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BY

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AUTHOR OF

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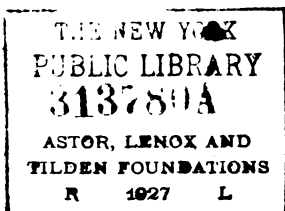
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TOO LATE REPENTED.

CHAPTER I.

‘AND so you are not happy?’

The answer came in a low, sad voice.

‘No! I am very unhappy.’

‘And yet it would seem to the casual spectator as though, if there were one woman in the world to be envied, you are that woman.’

‘The casual spectator! Yes. But what does the casual spectator know about any of us? For the matter of that, what do any of us know about each other, even

though we may be on intimate terms of friendship? What do even husbands and wives know of each other's real feelings? It is so difficult to understand, so terribly easy to misunderstand.'

'That, I think,' returned the first speaker, 'is because a woman who loves a man expects him to know all that is in her heart without her telling him. And probably *vice versa*.'

The foregoing dialogue was taking place between two young women over a cosy wood fire in a charming boudoir with a well-laden tea-table between them. The first speaker was fur-clad, and looked as though she had come off a journey; the other wore that dainty and eminently *fin de siècle* garment, the tea-gown, which, let us hope, the next century will still find in vogue. And, as a matter of fact, Mrs.

Tower had ten minutes earlier arrived to be the guest of her girlhood's most intimate friend, now Mrs. Delane.

Nelly Tower was a small fair woman, rather in the Dresden china style, and Ethel Delane was dark, handsome, with a something too imperious air, as though it were hers to command. And indeed, having been an heiress since the age of six, and high-spirited and wilful with that, her own will had been a law unto her and to those with whom she habitually dwelt. A handsome young woman, with eight thousand a year and decided views, is apt to become a despot. And alas! having one's own way and being able to set one's heel on the necks of one's dependents is not the surest road either to being happy or beloved, and to be happy and beloved were two things which Mrs.

Delane very ardently desired. Unfortunately for her, there were contradictory elements in her character, and these made her unhappy. She was at the same time tyrannical and tender-hearted; she was arbitrary, but had a strong sense of justice; wilful, but with an immense desire for approbation; proud and imperious, yet with tender feminine longings in secret—whilst she appeared to stand erect and defiant, she longed to lean and cling. Very few people understood her, and she did not understand herself at all.

After a slight pause, Mrs. Delane replied to her friend,

‘I am always trying to find out what Arthur thinks and feels. But every day it becomes more difficult. Every day he seems to grow colder, and often he looks annoyed and hurt, and if I ask him why

he will not tell me. And why he went away on Friday I cannot imagine.'

'Did he go suddenly, unexpectedly?' asked Mrs. Tower.

'Yes; he had said nothing about it before.'

'And did you remonstrate? Did you beg him to stay?'

'No,' with a proud gesture of her head, 'I would not stoop to that. Do you know, Nelly,' and Ethel looked up at her friend with tears in her eyes, 'it is a most humiliating thing to confess, but sometimes I have a horrible misgiving that he did not really love me, and only married me for my money. Oh! what a curse it is for a woman to have money! She can never be sure of being loved for herself.'

'Nonsense, my dear,' retorted her friend briskly, 'the curse of having money is a

very easy one to bear. Not having it is a curse, if you like. But what you say is absurd, unjust and untrue. I had plenty of opportunities of observing Captain Delane before he married, or even proposed to you, and I am certain that if ever a man loved a woman for her own sake, he loved you for yours, and he would have asked you to marry him sooner, but that he feared to be taken for a fortune-hunter. And did he not insist upon having your money settled on yourself, and under your own control ?

‘ Yes,’ returned Mrs. Delane, looking a little happier, ‘ that is true. But what has changed him ? At first I thought he adored me, and now he grows colder and more indifferent every day.’

‘ And you, I suppose,’ returned Mrs. Tower, ‘ vie with him in seeming cold and

indifferent, and probably put on for his benefit that haughty and contemptuous air which you are so fond of assuming when your Imperial Highness is offended?’

‘One cannot allow oneself to be trampled upon,’ returned Mrs. Delane, with dignity.

Nelly laughed.

‘I should like to see anyone trample on you, my dear,’ she said. ‘But now, if I may, I will go and take my things off, for I am getting too warm; and half-an-hour ago I thought I should never be warm again.’

Mrs. Delane rose, and preceded her guest to her room. Later they resumed their talk, and when they parted for the night, Ethel was in a much happier frame of mind and told herself that perhaps she had been a little too *exigeante*, and that

when her beloved returned, she would greet him with smiles, and begin a new and happier life.

The following morning, as she was dressing, Mrs. Delane received a message from her friend asking to be excused from appearing at breakfast as she had had a severe attack of neuralgia in the night, of which she was still feeling the effects. Ethel, who was always full of sympathy for suffering, flew to Mrs. Tower the moment she was dressed, in great concern.

‘I have been in agony,’ Nelly said, ‘but thank Heaven the pain has gone, and the only ill effect is that, for the present, I am nearly blind and can only see things in a blurred indistinct way. I do not even know what you have on. I shall probably be all right by luncheon, but if I were to get up now, I should be tumbling over

everything and might do myself an injury. Go and have your breakfast, and then come and sit with me a bit.'

Mrs. Delane, after many expressions of affectionate sympathy, complied ; but was back again in twenty minutes' time, armed with the morning papers to read to her disabled friend.

'I wish,' said Mrs. Tower, 'that you would, like a good creature, read my letters to me first.'

'Is it safe?' asked Ethel, playfully. 'I know you are a shocking flirt, and correspond with all sorts of young men.'

Mrs. Tower laughed.

'There is nothing that I am afraid of your seeing,' she replied, gaily ; 'but, if you come upon anything too ardent, you can put it on one side until I am able to read it myself.'

Mrs. Delane took up the little packet, and examined the envelopes.

‘First,’ she said, ‘there is one with a crown and Grenadier Guards, and the Windsor post-mark.’

‘Oh!’ said Nelly, ‘that is from Algy, my latest—quite a dear! That will amuse you.’

‘Then,’ proceeded Ethel, ‘there is one from your husband.’

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Mrs. Tower; ‘something must have gone wrong already, or he would not write.’

‘The third has a gold coronet and a big C underneath it.’

‘That is from my cousin Cynthia; probably about a ball.’

‘And the fourth,’ continued Ethel, scrutinising it attentively, ‘is in rather an

illiterate hand, and I cannot make the post-mark out.'

'That will keep,' remarked Mrs. Tower.
'Begin with Algy.'

Mrs. Delane obeyed.

"My dearest mother," she commenced, and then said, smiling, 'Is this another of your hopeful adopted brood?'

'Yes,' laughed Nelly, 'boys are always fond of that form of address; it is the only one that admits of such endearing terms.'

Mrs. Delane read the missive through, and both women laughed over it.

'Dear boy!' ejaculated Nelly, 'his sentiments are excellent, and his spelling is, as usual, I suppose, awful?'

'Well, yes,' admitted Mrs. Delane, 'it is rather bad; but, no doubt, he does everything else much better.'

‘Yes. He is first-rate at sport and athletics, and a very good soldier, I am told.’

Ethel broke the seal of the second letter which contained a few brief and injured lines from Mr. Tower, who had been unable to find some paper that he wanted after his wife’s departure. Then the third was communicated to Nelly, and caused some discussion, so that for some time the fourth was forgotten. Presently, however, Ethel opened it; but, as she took the enclosure from the envelope, she started, and a crimson blush suffused her cheeks. She glanced hastily at the signature—it was her husband’s.

‘Well!’ said Nelly, inquiringly, ‘and what is the other letter about? The one in the illiterate hand.’

For a moment Mrs. Delane was silent as she cast her eye rapidly over the sheets; then, rising hurriedly, and trying to make her voice seem natural, she said,

‘I have just remembered something very important I wanted to tell Hawkins;’ and she hastened from the room.

Her friend, not being able to see the expression in her face, felt no suspicion, and leaned comfortably back against her pillows waiting for her return. Meantime Ethel, amazed, bewildered, frightened, with a dreadful presentiment of disaster weighing on her heart, rushed to her boudoir, locked herself in, and began to read eagerly. As she read, her face grew ashy pale, she trembled in every limb, and had to sit down to finish it.

‘DEAR MRS. TOWER,’ (it ran,)

‘I know you are to go to Ethel to-day. I know, too, what a good friend you are to her, and I think you will be much better able to break to her what I am going to tell you than I could myself. I have taken the precaution to have the envelope directed by a stranger, so that her suspicions may not be aroused should she happen to see the outside of the letter. You must not think me a brute, and don’t let her think me one if you can help it, though of course she will at first be dreadfully angry and hurt. The step I am taking is neither hasty nor unconsidered, but has for weeks past been working in my brain. I am going to leave what most people consider a life of ease and luxury, because I can no longer continue to live it and keep my self-

respect. I had all along the gravest and most serious doubts of the wisdom of marrying Ethel, and it was only because I loved her so deeply and passionately that I at last overcame my scruples and proposed to her. I was a comparatively poor man without expectations, and I did not look upon marriage as a career. I endeavoured to prove by insisting on her fortune being settled upon herself that my affection was disinterested. For a short time all went well. We loved each other, and the glamour of love concealed sterner realities from our sight. But, after a time, it seemed to me that a change came over Ethel. At first she had behaved with great delicacy, referring to me on all subjects, and seeming anxious that I should never be reminded that the money was hers. But gradually she altered her

tactics. She began to resume the reins of government, to behave in an imperious manner, to make it evident to those around her that she was the sovereign power to be appealed and referred to—sometimes she would even countermand orders which I had given. I felt it impossible to remonstrate with her in words, but I thought she would have discernment enough to perceive by the change in my manner that she was wounding and offending me. I think she did observe it, but instead of showing any wish to conciliate or soothe me, she became more arbitrary, more imperious—it seemed as if she took a positive pleasure in reminding me of my position. And yet, although she was doing what anyone with quick perceptions or fine feelings would have

known must be galling and irritating to me, she resented my coldness, and herself assumed an injured air. I cannot suppose she was ignorant of my feelings, for she is a thoroughly intelligent, and, I used to think, a sympathetic woman. Wishing to avoid all possibility of misunderstanding, I pointedly refrained from giving a single order, and, if a servant came to me, I sent him at once to her for instructions. She took this as a matter of course, and gradually left off consulting me or endeavouring to ascertain whether I had wishes on any subject. And for the last shoot she invited two men to the house without even asking if I was agreeable to their coming, and, as a matter of fact, one is particularly distasteful to me. Then and there I made up my mind to do what I had already in contemplation—to go to

America, and see what chance I have of making my way there. I had not the courage to tell her of my intention, for I knew there would be a tremendous scene, and I hate scenes. No doubt her pride will be far more hurt than her love, for indeed I find it impossible to believe that she really loves me, or she would not have subjected me to the humiliation she has done. I am going, in the first instance, to look round, and do not intend to be absent more than a couple of months. I think it probable that she will be so embittered against me by this step that she will desire me never to return to her. Better that than to go on leading the life we have been doing lately, and which would inevitably in time make us hate one another.

‘I sail by the North German Lloyd boat

the day after to-morrow. Send me a line or wire to say you have received this, but I ask you as a favour not to tell her until I have fairly started on my journey. Tear up my letter and put the substance into kinder, gentler words. I feel I have written harshly, even bitterly, but I think that is because I once loved her so passionately, and God knows I love her still, though I cannot go on living with her at the price of my own self-respect. If I had more money of my own, I should have been able to persuade or perhaps laugh her out of her imperious ways, but, under the circumstances, I could not risk a retort that I should be unable to forgive. It will be very kind of you to write and tell me what happens to the "Post Office, New York," and do not think harshly of me. You cannot even dimly conceive

what it is to a man of a proud and independent spirit to have been humiliated as I have been.

‘Yours very sincerely,

‘ARTHUR DELANE.’

CHAPTER II.

MRS. DELANE sat staring as though she saw a ghost, and indeed she did, the ghost of dead love and happiness. And there is no other spectre, however horrid, that can so chill and terrify the soul. Oh! if she had but guessed! Why, why had he not told her what was in his mind? And all the time she had been chafing at what she believed to be his indifference, his want of interest! But now she knew, all should be put right. Thank God, it was not too late! the ship did not sail until to-morrow: perhaps she would be

able to catch him before he left London : he would surely be there to-day. She looked at the clock : it was ten minutes past ten : she would just have time to catch the eleven train. She rang and ordered the brougham to be round in half-an-hour. She must go alone ; she who had never in her life been anywhere by herself ; but she could not take her maid, not knowing what was going to happen. And what should she say to Nelly ? Anything rather than the truth. Never, never should she see that cruel letter which, by a blessed accident, she had been prevented from reading. How wicked, how heartless of him to humble her thus before another woman, even though she were her bosom friend.

She desired her maid to put in a bag such things as she might want if she had

to be absent for a night, and answered her somewhat sharply when she asked, with unconcealed astonishment, if she were not to accompany, or at least follow, her.

Then Ethel ran back to Mrs. Tower.

‘Oh, Nelly dear,’ she cried, ‘I have just had a telegram saying that Aunt Mary is very ill, and I *must* run up to London to see her. I know you will forgive me, under the circumstances. Please give your own orders, and be sure you go for a drive this afternoon. I hope to be back to-night; but, in any case, I shall return to-morrow.’

‘Oh, dear!’ cried Mrs. Tower, ‘I am sorry. What is the matter with her? Poor, dear Aunt Mary. Of course, dearest, go! don’t think of me. I shall get on all right. But is it serious?’

‘Yes, no—at least, rather—I will send you a wire when I have seen her. Now I must run. I have not a moment to spare.’

She kissed her friend, and went hastily from the room.

Mrs. Delane’s reflections, as she travelled to London, were of an agonising nature. Until this moment that the fear of losing him was before her eyes, she had never realised how she loved him. And that is one of the ingenious cruelties of life. We may live, day in day out, with some one and not feel conscious of any particular ecstasy at his presence or in his company, but present to our minds the fact that we have lost him for a long time, perhaps for ever, and the agony is so intense as to make brain and heart reel. Ethel felt a physical anguish and terror

each time the idea crossed her mind that she was going, perhaps, to be parted for ever from her beloved.

She had not yet learned any of life's hard lessons—she was but just beyond the A B C, and had only mastered words of one syllable, and the spelling of those had been made easy to her. She had but one idea: to prevent her husband from leaving her, and as to how she should accomplish this she did not care. She was willing to abase, to humble herself in the dust, to do anything in the world rather than lose him. For she had learned in the last hour that the thought of death itself held no bitterness like the thought of living her life without him. She was willing to say to herself, to him, to all the world, that it was she who was in fault. She had sinned, perhaps, in ignorance,

but she had sinned, and she was prepared to make atonement in full. But the first thing was to find him: if she did not succeed in seeing him in London, why, then she would go after him to Southampton, even on board ship if necessary. It occurred to her that the first thing to be done was to get some money—she had only a couple of sovereigns in her purse—then she would be ready for any emergency. Arrived in London she got into a hansom and drove to her banker's, where she drew a hundred pounds. The fact of doing this reminded her that she might perhaps hear of Captain Delane at Cox's, and thither she drove next. Captain Delane had been there the previous day, she was informed. She then proceeded to his club and learned that he had dined there the evening before, but had not been seen

to-day. It was now going on for one o'clock. Ethel, though a prey to the deepest anxiety, felt that she had plenty of time before her, and proceeded next to the hotel where Arthur had been in the habit of putting up in his bachelor days. No! he had not been seen or heard of there. She could not think of anywhere else to go in search of him—what was to be done? It was no use driving about the streets looking for him, and she determined to go to the Albemarle Hotel, order some luncheon, and reflect on her next move.

As she was pretending to eat, for, in her anxiety, the very sight of food was abhorrent to her, she had an inspiration. She rose, put on her veil and gloves, and walked out of the hotel back to the club. Under ordinary circumstances it would have been a severe

ordeal for her to walk up the steps where three or four men were lounging, but when heart and mind are absorbed in one vital consideration, minor details become of no importance. She went up to the hall porter and asked if Captain Delane had yet come in. The man looked surprised, it was hardly half-an-hour since she was there before.

She saw the expression of his face, and spoke calmly,

‘I have some news for Captain Delane that is of the most vital importance for him to hear. I am at the Albemarle Hotel. I shall be there all the afternoon, and if you will send word to me the instant he comes in, I will give you five pounds.’

The man assumed a doubtful expression. He did not like the look of a lady coming after a gentleman to his club—

that generally meant a row and, if he consented to her proposal, he might get himself into trouble. But, five pounds was not without its charm for him.

‘Well, ‘m,’ he said, ‘I should be very ‘appy to oblige you, but I don’t want to get myself into a row. Wouldn’t it do if I was to tell the Captain that you’re wait-in’ for him at the Halbemarle?’

‘No, no,’ she answered, with something of her natural imperiousness; ‘that would not do at all.’

He shook his head—he liked the look of it less than ever.

‘I will give you ten pounds.’

The man continued to ponder.

‘Ten pounds wouldn’t make up to me for losing my place,’ he said.

Ethel trembled with anxiety.

‘Oh!’ she said, in a concentrated voice,

‘I implore you. It may mean life or death!’

‘Well, look ’ere, ’m,’ he said, and his tone was slightly familiar because he had his own ideas about the situation, ‘will you promise not to make a row on the steps ’ere or call the gentleman names, but go off quiet with him somewhere and have it out?’

Ethel looked at him in bewilderment.

‘What do you mean?’ she said. Then blushing deeply, she added, haughtily, ‘I am Mrs. Delane.’

‘No offence, ’m,’ said the man, unconvinced. ‘Very well, then, if the Captain comes in I’ll send round and let you know at once, and p’raps you wouldn’t mind just settin’ in a four-wheel cab and sendin’ the man in to me to say as you was there. It ’ud look better than comin’ in yourself.’

Ethel, who had never been spoken to in her life by an inferior in this manner, had a volcanic sensation in her breast; but conscious of her helplessness and the paramount importance of obtaining the wretch's services, she controlled herself, and merely said,

‘If you enable me to see Captain Delane, I shall, as I said, give you ten pounds.’

And with these words she withdrew, and returned to her hotel. She did not resume her unfinished luncheon, but throwing herself into an easy-chair by the fire, gave the rein to her thoughts. She had no personal acquaintance with the seamy side of life; it had not been hers to struggle through its thorny paths and clamber over its obstructing boulders; kind Fortune had sent heralds before her to clear the way, to level uneven tracts,

pick out the stones, and strew with sand the slippery places; until to-day she had never even been anywhere alone. But she was not naturally a helpless woman; her intellect and her reasoning powers were good, and she was by no means deficient in will and courage—there was even in her some of that leaven which goes to the making of heroines. Just now she was smarting with wounded love and pride, but she had discernment enough to know that if she allowed pride to gain a temporary mastery over love, love would revenge himself by inflicting the most cruel and prolonged sufferings upon her. At any cost she felt that her husband must not be allowed to leave her, and she longed madly for the moment when she should be face to face with him. She would not permit herself to believe in the

possibility of failure—only kind Heaven ! bring him to her side, and she undertook the rest.

Mercifully, she was given the one all-important factor, time. The boat did not sail until to-morrow—if she failed to see him in London, she would go to Southampton. Then she wondered where the North German Lloyd office was, and what time the ship started. If it were early, perhaps the passengers might have to embark over-night or sleep at Southampton. She must find this out; but as she could not leave the hotel for an instant for fear of missing a message from the club, she decided on engaging a commissionaire to do her errand. She rang the bell, and, having made inquiries, ascertained that there was a messenger then in the hotel, who would execute any com-

missions she might have, and she sent for him at once and gave her orders. In half-an-hour he returned to say the boat would sail at two o'clock, and that a special train to convey the passengers would leave Waterloo at 11.15. The moments crept into hours; the early darkness set in: she listened with feverish anxiety to every footfall, but none paused at her door, except when the waiter came to ask if he should light the lamps or bring her tea. Until to-day she had never known what real suffering meant; the twinges of heart-ache that had visited her on account of her husband's fancied coldness seemed as nothing compared with this torturing suspense. If she should not be able to see him until he was in the train or on board the boat (for it was possible he might go to Southampton over-night—she knew he

had friends there), how could she then hope to prevail upon him, for it would be impossible to say to him in public all that she had now in her heart, and which she would pour out were they alone together. Suddenly she remembered her promise to telegraph to Mrs. Tower, and then she began to consider how vitally important it was that neither she, the servants, nor anyone else should ever suspect what her errand to London had been. She rang, asked for a form, and wrote out a short message. '*Nothing serious. Hope to return to-morrow. Will wire in morning;*' and despatched it.

It was six o'clock now, and an uncontrollable nervousness took possession of her. She had eaten scarcely anything that day, and the unusual excitement and worry were beginning to tell upon her.

She was more madly anxious than ever to see her husband, but the extreme tenderness she had felt for him, the great desire to atone for having hurt him, was gradually giving way to a sense of anger and irritation against him. She had suffered intensely the last few hours, and her sufferings were increasing at every moment with her suspense, and, as it is a natural instinct of fallen human nature to want to strike back at him who hurts us, she began to feel that he had treated her cruelly, and to long to reproach and upbraid him.

At a quarter-past six a note was brought her. She tore open the envelope. It contained but two words, 'Come now,' and with a wildly beating heart she ran downstairs, had a cab called, and drove to the club. Arrived there, she sent the man

in to ask for Captain Delane, and sat waiting in an agony of nervousness. Would he guess that it was she, and escape by a back door to evade her? In the excited state of her nerves, this seemed to her rather probable than not. But in less than five minutes he came out and approached the cab. She could see the expression of his face by the lamplight—it was both annoyed and embarrassed.

‘You here, Ethel?’ he said, in a constrained voice.

She could hear the beating of her heart, but she replied, almost coldly,

‘Please come with me. I have something to say to you.’

Without a word he got into the cab, and she told the man to drive back to the hotel. On the way, neither spoke. Captain Delane had the painful consciousness

that there was a very bad quarter-of-an-hour in front of him, and Ethel's heart was the seat of such a tumult of feelings that present utterance was choked. Besides, privacy and time were absolute necessities for the coming interview.

He put out his hand to help her to alight, but she jumped out without availing herself of it—just now she felt she could not bear to touch him.

She took her way to the sitting-room, and he followed her.

Where were the tender, loving words with which she had intended to greet him? Where the humility of the suppliant with which she had meant to plead to him for her heart's life? She confronted him the picture of a proud, indignant woman, and the sight of her attitude hardened his heart. Why, alas! can

we not act up to our best resolves and instincts? Why do we so often do the very thing which we would not do, which we have told ourselves a thousand times will be fatal to our interests? It is because of the passion within us which we have not learned to control, and which becomes our master when we would fain have it for our slave.

Ah! had she but followed the dictates of her better nature; had she but flung her arms about his neck, and with her heart against his heart, her cheek against his, murmured the loving, tender words that lay so near the surface: 'Oh, love, do not leave me! You are the very life of my heart—I cannot live without you. Do you not know that all I have is yours? how could you misjudge me? But if I have hurt you, all unwillingly and un-

knowingly, forgive me for our love's sake!'

Had she spoken thus, how different would have been the result. Her husband did love her—he had already had very severe twinges of conscience about leaving her in the manner he was doing, and, if he was proud, he was neither unjust nor unreasonable. But, seeing her angry and defiant demeanour, he said to himself that his intended action was perfectly justifiable, and that he would carry it out.

CHAPTER III.

HE stood waiting for her to speak—he had not long to wait.

‘And so,’ she said, with flashing eyes, and in a voice that trembled from excitement and emotion, ‘you intended to leave me without one word; to desert me for months, perhaps for years, perhaps altogether; to humiliate and disgrace me in the sight of everyone! You take it into your head that I have committed some imaginary offence against you, and you write to another woman to complain of me instead of coming and telling me of my

supposed fault. Yes, you humble me before my friend, and for what? I swear I never had an ungenerous thought towards you—I never even remembered that the wretched money was mine: I would have given you, ungrudgingly, everything in the world: I only took the management of things because you seemed so careless and different. And if I asked some friends of mine to shoot, have I not always been too delighted to welcome any friend of yours, and have I no rights as your wife and the mistress of the house even had the money been yours and not mine?’

Her indignant, defiant manner gave her words a greater significance than they had in themselves. The effect was to make him colder and more resolute—he felt no softness towards her now.

‘I see,’ he said, chillingly, ‘that I made

a great mistake in choosing Mrs. Tower to act as mediator between us.'

'You did indeed,' she retorted, 'but not in the way you suppose. Nelly has not seen your letter, and never will.'

Captain Delane cast a surprised glance at his wife.

'Did you open her letter?' he asked, and his tone irritated Ethel unspeakably.

'Yes,' she returned, her cheeks aflame. 'I did, by her request. She was suffering from an attack of neuralgia which affected her sight, and she asked me to read her letters to her. And that,' with increasing anger, 'is how I came to have the privilege of reading your grievances at first-hand.'

Captain Delane reflected to himself that Fate had curious ironical little ways of her own.

‘It is very unfortunate,’ he observed, aloud.

‘And I,’ returned Ethel, ‘think it was very fortunate. It at least spared me one humiliation that you intended for me.’

‘Ah,’ thought her husband to himself, ‘it is only her pride that is hurt, not her love. If I give in to her now, we shall only go from bad to worse. It will be far better for both of us to have time to think things over.’

But although he felt cold and angry towards her now, he knew that he loved her, and he did not want to give her unnecessary pain. So he said, in a kinder voice,

‘Do not let us part bad friends, Ethel. We have not been very happy of late, and every day the breach seems to have grown

wider. I believe that a few months' absence will do us both all the good in the world, and that when we come back to each other, we shall be able to make a fresh start and be happier than we have ever been yet.'

She grew white to the lips, her limbs trembled under her; there was something in his voice that carried the awful conviction to her soul that he would not be dissuaded from his resolve.

'Do you mean to say?' she asked, in a harsh, strained voice, for something seemed to catch her by the throat, 'do you mean to say that you insist on leaving me when you know that it will break my heart?'

He approached and took her hand, and spoke soothingly.

'My dear child, I have taken my passage;

I have made all my arrangements. I am bound to go. And, believe me, it will be for the best.'

'It will not be for the best!' she cried, in an agonised voice, 'it will kill me! I cannot bear it. You must not, shall not leave me. Oh, I implore you,' (and now she flung herself upon his breast,) 'it would kill me. You cannot, must not, *shall* not go!'

He held her in his arms, but he did not answer.

'Say,' she cried, sobbing, 'say, swear you will not go!'

But he continued silent, although he felt thoroughly wretched.

She withdrew herself from his embrace, and stood staring at him.

'Do you mean to say,' she repeated, in a gasping voice, 'that you insist on going,

even though you know it will break my heart?’

‘Be reasonable,’ he answered, in a soothing voice, ‘do not make it so hard for us both. Come, let us dine together to-night, and part good friends with pleasant and kind thoughts of each other.’

‘Never,’ she cried, passionately; ‘if you leave me, leave me for good and all—I will never see you again!’

‘That is nonsense,’ he returned, coldly.

‘Is it nonsense!’ she burst out, beside herself with grief, fear, anger. ‘If you leave me now, like this, I will never see you again even if it kills me!’

She could not possibly have pursued more unwise tactics than to rouse his resistance, his defiant spirit—her words seemed to his morbidly proud nature to convey a threat that she would deprive

him not only of herself but of the benefits of her fortune, and he was up in arms at once.

‘You must do as you choose,’ he answered, coldly. ‘I claim the right at least to freedom of action—hundreds of men leave their wives to go to America, or Norway, or India for a few months.’

‘Not in the way you are leaving me,’ she retorted, bitterly; ‘suddenly, without warning, without my knowledge, making me a by-word, a laughing-stock to my friends, my servants, to the whole world!’

‘Always her pride,’ he thought, bitterly, and as we know unjustly, ‘only her pride; only what people will think!’

‘I wish now,’ he said, slowly, ‘that I had acted differently—I wish I had told you all along of my determination. The reason I did not do so was that I wished

to avoid this very scene that we are having now.'

Ethel's passion blazed out afresh.

'And what right have you to leave me?' she cried. 'You have married me—I am your wife—you have no right to desert me. I chose you out of a dozen men because I loved you, and I thought you loved me for myself, and I do not believe that one of them would have treated me in the cruel, heartless way that you are doing!'

He was stung by her taunt—no man likes to have himself contrasted unfavourably with other members of his sex.

'There is no doubt,' he returned, coldly, 'that our marriage was a great mistake. My better judgment told me so from the first—no man who respects himself should ever consent to be dependent on a woman.'

At his words and the tone in which

they were spoken a dreadful conviction forced itself upon Ethel that the breach she had so anxiously wished to heal had become immeasurably wider in the last quarter-of-an-hour. She saw that he was bent on going, and that no word which she could speak would alter his determination.

‘You never loved me!’ she cried; ‘you only love yourself and your own pride!’

‘I think,’ he answered, ‘that I might say that more truthfully of you. But,’ changing his tone, ‘for God’s sake, if we are to part, let us not part like this with bitter words and thoughts. Come! I will make a concession. I must go, because all my plans are made, and I have every hope that my journey may lead to something; but, if you wish it, I will return in two months from this time. What is two

months? You can amuse yourself; have your friends about you, and, before you have even had time to miss me, I shall be back.'

His tone was kind now, and he advanced to put his arm round her.

But she was maddened by her sense of failure, by her fear of the coming misery, and she started back to avoid his touch.

'If you go,' she cried, 'I will learn to do without you, and you need never come back to me again!'

He uttered an impatient sigh.

'It is foolish to talk like this,' he said, 'and you will think better of it. I say again that I am sorry I did not tell you of my intention—I ought to have done so. I wish I had; but my regret comes too late, and I cannot alter what is done. For God's sake, do not spoil both our lives

simply for your pride's sake. We have loved each other; we do love each other—there has been a misunderstanding on both sides, and I am certain that nothing in the world will sooner put it straight than a temporary separation.'

'It is you,' she said, 'who spoil our lives. I have never shown anything but kindness to you, and you requite it by breaking my heart and outraging me before everyone.'

'You talk like a child,' he answered, impatiently. 'What outrage is there in running over to America to see if I have a chance of earning my own living? Surely you ought to think better of me for preferring to be independent than if I were content to be a miserable cur hanging on a woman's bounty.'

'You had no right to marry me if you

meant to leave me,' she returned, bitter and unconvinced.

'Oh!' he returned, 'that is one of the pleasing features of marriage that we never know what lies before us, or what surprises it holds for us. Every man and woman who love, live for a time in a fool's paradise, and, in spite of what they see around them, are convinced that their fate will be different. And every man and woman who marry have their sure awakening, only some take it more philosophically than others, and make the best of it.'

'To what have you awakened?' she asked, bitterly. 'All that I had of love, of worldly goods, was yours, is yours. If you had sensitive feelings, so had I. If you suspected me of the most revolting of all meannesses, purse pride, I felt that

doubt which every woman, I suppose, who has money is bound to feel at times, the doubt of being loved for herself. Well, let us cry quits, and say we have both been wrong; we have misunderstood each other. I am content to leave everything in your hands; never to give an order in the house again.'

Her words were humble enough, but her tone and gestures were full of pride, and the effect they had on her husband was the reverse of soothing or softening.

'I should be sorry,' he answered, 'to accept such a sacrifice from you; indeed, I must have made myself very badly understood if you can imagine I asked anything of the sort.'

'Then what do you wish?'

'I wish,' he answered, 'to be able to feel that I am not a mere nonentity, but

that I am your husband, and that you have sufficient regard for me to think my opinion and advice worth having occasionally. And I wish,' he said, much more kindly; 'I wish you not to feel bitter and angry against me and to let us part feeling kind to each other. We are both a little sore now, if I went back home with you our resentment would still be smouldering and would soon break out again, but when we have had time to think and to miss each other as we shall, we shall meet again on different terms, and,' smiling, 'I should not wonder if we were happy ever after.'

'No!' she said, resolutely—'give up this journey and I will do anything, everything in the world to please you. If you go, I never want to see you again.'

He did not for an instant believe her words: he thought they were the simple ebullition of temper at her thwarted will, and answered,

‘Well, that must be for you to decide. But come, at all events, let us part friends. I had promised to dine with Tracy, but I will put him off if you like, and we will dine together, here or anywhere else that you choose.’

But Ethel was in that condition of mind when a passionate and impulsive person generally says the opposite of what he means.

‘No,’ she answered; ‘if you have resolved to leave me and counted the cost, go now, and good-bye for ever.’

Again her words seemed to him to contain that hateful allusion to her money, and to be intended for a threat.

‘Very well,’ he returned, coldly ; ‘if we part like this, it is your doing.’

‘You would rather,’ she cried, scornfully, ‘have left me without a word. It was very chivalrous and generous—indeed you have every right to be proud of yourself.’

He bit his lip.

‘It seems,’ he said, ‘the longer we bandy words, the less likely we are to part friends. So perhaps I had better go.’

‘Yes,’ she returned, almost violently, in her despair, ‘go!’

He lingered for a moment.

‘Surely,’ he said, in a conciliatory voice, ‘you will kiss me and say good-bye;’ and he approached her, but she sprang back.

‘Do not touch me!’ she almost shrieked, beside herself with anger and misery.

Slowly, reluctantly, he took his hat and prepared to go, but, before he reached the door, he turned and stopped.

‘Ethel!’ he said, in an appealing voice; but she cried, ‘Go, go!’ And so he went.

She listened for a moment to his retreating foot-steps; then she went to the door, locked it, and, flinging herself down beside the sofa, gave way to the agony of her grief. It seemed to her that she was tasting the bitterness of death; that life held no more of pain and woe than had been crowded into this last hour; that, if she lived to threescore years and ten, she could never suffer more than she was doing now. And then came the awful thought that this pain was going to last hours, days, weeks, perhaps months, perhaps years, and the thought terrified and appalled her. He was gone, and she had

looked her last upon him; she had to live her life without him—she had said and done all she could to stay him, and had said and done it in vain. She could add no other argument to what she had already urged: he was cruel and wicked, and he did not love her.'

And that thought was as the turning of a knife in a wound.

Presently she was aroused by some one trying the handle of the door, after which there was a low tapping. She sprang to her feet, and all the blood rushed from her heart. Could it be Arthur returned.

'Who is there?' she said, in a stifled voice.

'It's me, ma'am, the waiter. Will you please to order dinner?'

This homely and commonplace interruption to her tragedy made Ethel re-

member that the ordinary customs of life must be observed, even though one's heart is broken. She had no wish to excite curiosity or remark. Commanding her voice she said, without unclosing the door,

‘I shall not dine. Bring tea and a cutlet in half-an-hour.’

Glancing at the clock she saw that it wanted only ten minutes to eight. When she heard the man's retreating footsteps she unlocked the door, and going to her bed-room did her best to wash away the traces of her tears. It was too late to think of returning home, and she made up her mind to remain in London the night. Under any circumstances, she could not have faced Nelly or her servants to-night, and she knew that when she was calmer she would have to decide how to

tell the story of her husband's departure and to make the best of it. The very effort to compose herself for the benefit of the waiter braced her nerves, and she began to discover that she felt ill and faint for want of food. The mirror showed her that her face told strange tales, and she put on her hat and veil again, letting the lace fall to the tip of her nose. When the man re-appeared she assumed a perfectly calm demeanour, and asked questions and gave orders in a manner which she flattered herself would remove any lurking suspicion from his breast. As if any poor mortal could ever succeed in deceiving those Grand Inquisitors who look so respectfully unsuspecting as they serve us!

She felt distinctly better for the meal, which she forced herself to eat, though

the pain and ache were still gnawing at her heart. Suddenly she remembered her debt to the club porter, which until now had escaped her memory. She asked for paper and envelopes, and no sooner was her repast cleared away, than she put a ten-pound note into an envelope, and wrote on a piece of paper, 'Mrs. Delane encloses the ten pounds promised, and requests that a receipt may be sent by bearer.' She despatched this, and in less than a quarter-of-an-hour received the acknowledgement with the man's best respects and thanks.

She had drawn her chair to the fire, and was sitting deep in thought. She knew that no matter how great her anguish might be she must bear it alone, and conceal it from everyone as best she might. After all, pride has its uses, and

keeps those who have it from becoming objects of pity and contempt to the world. She would make everyone believe that she had known all along of her husband's intended trip to America—even to Nelly, who was her greatest friend, she could not tell the bitter truth. She would confess frankly that she had objected to his going, and that she regretted his absence, but never, never should the real truth be wrung from her. It occurred to her that Mrs. Tower would naturally ask what had become of her fourth letter in the illiterate hand, and she determined to pretend that in the hurry of the moment she must have mislaid it, and express concern when, after much search, she was unable to find it.

For the first half-hour she was laying her plans, the pain at her heart was less

acute. But, when this was done, the tooth of the worm began to gnaw again with a keener edge. Her anger against her husband was subsiding, and remorse took its place. Oh, why, why had she allowed her passion to get the better of her: why had she not kept to her first resolve of winning him back by fair and gentle and loving means? Perhaps these might have prevailed. She had uttered proud, angry words; had declared that if he left her she would never see him again, and she knew that these threats had been mere vain, empty, foolish words. She loved him with all her soul; she could not live without him: could not, could not, *could not!*

CHAPTER IV.

LIKE a sudden gleam of lightning on a dark night a thought flashed across her mind. If he would not stay, she would go with him: there was only one thing she could not bear, and that was to be parted from him. Her brain whirled with excitement; her breath came thick and fast; her mind was made up on the instant. She cared nothing for trifling obstacles; cared nothing for what her friends might think or what the world might say. Let it be he and she against the world, and then come what might.

She was no longer angry with him ; her brain was full of happy excitement—this time to-morrow she would be with him, and to leave her would be beyond his power. The difficulties of getting her passage, of making preparations for her voyage, were as nothing to her : the discomfort of travelling without a maid, the possibility of sea-sickness, the doubt of her getting proper accommodation, the world's wonder at her mad freak ; all these were 'trifles light as air.' Fortunately there would be time in the morning to do a good deal, as the train did not leave Waterloo until 11.15. The shops would be open in time for her to get what was absolutely necessary, and, at this season of the year, it was extremely improbable that the ship would be crowded. But, whatever befel, would not her beloved

be with her to smooth all difficulties? She must not let him know of her presence until the ship was fully under weigh, and then, with the best will in the world, he could not send her back. She must write to Nelly, making her story seem as plausible as possible, and to this task she now directed all her energies. This is what she wrote :

‘ MY DEAREST NELLY,

‘ When you read this letter, you will think that your friend has gone quite mad. I am going to embark on a most extraordinary adventure, and it is not more than half-an-hour since I made up my mind to it. Arthur is going to America to-morrow, and I am going with him. Can you believe the evidence of your senses? I hardly can of mine. It

really does seem a mad freak, but there is a sort of raciness about it too. I daresay I shall be very uncomfortable and wish myself back a thousand times, but, just now, the excitement of the adventure has a great charm for me. I don't know what Davis will say—of course she thinks I cannot move a yard without her; but I think a maid would be more hindrance than help, as she would be certain to be very ill. And, indeed, there would hardly be time to get her packed and here as the train leaves for Southampton at 11.15. You will think I am behaving shamefully to you, but I know you will forgive me, and do, dearest, try and make my escapade seem as little mad to my household as you can. We have not lost all our money or committed any crime, so are not flying from creditors or justice. I have often

thought I should like to see America, and perhaps this is the only chance I may ever have. Tell Hawkins that everything is to go on just the same as usual. I shall write to her from the ship, for I have not time to-night. Do, dear, forgive me. I will bring you back a nice fairing. This looks like offering a bribe! And, with much love, believe me always

‘Your most affectionate

‘ETHEL DELANE.’

She read it over, and acknowledged to herself that it would hardly be very satisfactory to the recipient, but it was the best she could do. Then she began to consider how she should supply herself with absolute necessities for the voyage. Life had hitherto gone on wheels for her, and she had not had occasion to prac-

tise the qualities of self-reliance and independence. But she possessed both in a marked degree, along with very good brain-power, and, in the slang parlance of to-day, her head was 'screwed on the right way.'

She made a list of things that seemed positively indispensable, and, as these were tolerably numerous, she reflected that they would take some time to get—perhaps more than she would have to spare. She then bethought herself of writing to various shops where she was well known, giving a list of what she wanted, and desiring that the things might be ready for her inspection when she called in the morning, as she was going suddenly and unexpectedly on a journey. She did not forget to order a trunk in which to pack them. Then she wrote to the North

German Lloyd office, requesting them to wire the instant they received her letter, saying if she could have a state-room, or what accommodation they could give her ; and she also wrote to her banker, directing him to send her another hundred pounds. If there was not time to send it to the hotel, she begged that some one she knew by sight might meet her on the platform at Waterloo at eleven o'clock.

It was half-past ten by the time she had written her letters, and, not caring to trust them to the waiter, she sent for the manager and begged that, as they were very important, he would be so good as to see they were posted.

Then she once more drew her chair up to the fire, and gave herself over to reflection. The pain was gone from her heart ; indeed, she felt wildly happy and exhib-

arated. She had not one unkind thought of her husband, but fully and frankly forgave him all his crimes, since she was going to steal this delightful march upon him. She laughed to herself over the surprise and consternation that would reign at the Manor House when her flight was known, and she felt curious to know how Nelly would break the intelligence. She was a very clever little lady, and might be trusted to do the best that circumstances permitted.

Mrs. Delane's next move was to make friends with the chambermaid; to secure her services for the morning by the promise of a liberal *douceur*. She was to be called punctually at seven; and, having given her directions, she went to bed. Her body being tired out, and her mind at rest, she slept soundly until she was called. On

awaking, she was pleased to find that her resolution was nothing daunted, and that her feeling of pleasurable excitement still continued. Ah! how differently would the day have broken had it been going to part her from her beloved; to see her return widowed and wretched to her home. Fortune favoured her: everything went well. All her commands were implicitly obeyed—the various emporiums to which she applied were only too anxious to serve so excellent a customer. She learned that she could have a state-room on the ship. Punctually at half-past ten a banker's clerk arrived with the money—the chambermaid packed her trunk as if by magic, and at twenty minutes to eleven she left the hotel for Waterloo. She wore a long, black travelling cloak, a felt hat, and in the cab she put on a second thick veil

which entirely concealed her features. Arrived at the station, she gave the guard five shillings to put her into a carriage, either alone or with ladies only, and she retired into the furthest corner and refrained from even looking out of the window. All the way to Southampton she continued to feel a pleasurable excitement, and was not even daunted by the waving of the trees which indicated a stiffish breeze, although she was by no means a first-rate sailor. She would be with her beloved—that was enough. Fortune still smiled upon her: she got on board without any difficulty, and proceeded at once to her cabin which was large and comfortable. She determined not to emerge from it until they were well on their way, and it was impossible for her to be sent back in a small boat. which she thought her

husband quite capable of doing, if he discovered her in time. After a couple of hours she began to feel very squeamish as there was a considerable amount of motion, and was quite unequal to walk about the deck in search of Captain Delane. She rang the bell, and a brisk, pleasant-looking steward answered it—she was feeling very ill by this time—and she asked him faintly if he would be so good as to find Captain Delane and ask him to come to her. He was gone about a quarter-of-an-hour during which time she lay on her sofa faintly groaning. The excitement was gone by now, and she was a prey to that nausea which for the time can over-ride both pain and pleasure. Presently he returned.

‘The gentleman isn’t on board, ma’am,’ he said.

Ethel sprang to a sitting posture, her cheeks scarlet.

‘Oh, but indeed you must be mistaken!’ she cried.

‘No, ma’am,’ he replied, firmly, ‘the gentleman is not on board. His name is on the list of passengers, and I have been to his cabin, but he is not there nor his luggage either.’

Oh,’ she cried, desperately, ‘but I cannot go on alone. How can I get back to Southampton? I will give you anything if I can be taken back there.’

The man shook his head.

‘It can’t be done, ma’am, it isn’t possible. But if you were going with the gentleman, how was it you didn’t look for him when you first came on board?’ and he eyed her suspiciously.

Ethel felt as if she were going mad.

‘Oh, pray, pray,’ she cried, ‘ask the Captain to come to me or let me go to him. I will give a hundred pounds if I can be taken back to Southampton. I have the money here with me now.’

‘I am very sorry, ma’am,’ he replied, ‘but it is no use. The Captain can’t come to you now and you can’t go to him, and it wouldn’t make any difference if you did. We couldn’t put back now for a thousand pounds.’

‘Couldn’t you put me off into a fishing-boat or anything,’ she implored, desperately

‘No, ma’am,’ he answered, ‘there is nothing for it. I am really very sorry for you;’ and he looked touched by her distress. ‘I can’t think,’ he continued, ‘what can have happened. If he missed the train, he would have most likely sent a wire.’

In his own mind he thought the case looked queer, but had a shrewd idea that the gentleman wished to avoid the lady, and, having got wind of her intention to follow him, had kept out of the way on purpose.

No words could describe the agony of Ethel's mind when she found herself the victim of this freak of Fortune. Despair took possession of her soul; she felt as though she had got her death-blow. The idea of being alone on the wide sea, without a creature whom she had ever seen before, was so appalling and terrifying that her mind almost refused to grasp it. Perhaps it was merciful that her physical sensations became so distressing as to render her almost insensible to any other consideration.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Captain Delane left the hotel after his interview with his wife, he returned to his club a prey to many conflicting but all disagreeable sensations. First of all he wished from the bottom of his heart that he had not elected to leave Ethel without giving her full notice of his intention. It was not the first time that he had entertained misgivings on the subject both of the justice and the kindness of such an act. The fact was, he was absolutely bent on going to America, and, knowing that she would be certain to take it very badly,

decided not to risk a scene. Now he said to himself that, once having made up his mind on the point, it would have been wiser and more consistent not to allow his letter to reach the Manor House until he was beyond pursuit. Even had not that unlucky chance placed it in Ethel's hands, it was possible that Mrs. Tower, being so great a friend of hers, might have thought it only right to communicate his intention to her at once. Yes, there was no doubt he had made a sad *fasco* of the whole business. He did not for a moment think himself in the wrong for relieving himself of a position that had become untenable, but he ought to have done it in a different way. At this point he turned into the club, and, finding the man with whom he was going to dine in the hall, he had no more opportunity for the time to pursue

his reflections. He did not enjoy his dinner; the thought of the scene with his wife, of her anger, misery, and evident distress, would continually crop up, and every time it did so he felt more and more uncomfortable. Men are poor hands at dissembling, and his friend soon perceived that he was by no means in his usual good spirits, and taxed him with the fact.

‘You seem rather down on your luck, old chap!’ he remarked in the middle of dinner—‘not quite so keen about going as you were yesterday. You’ve just remembered that you’re leaving your heart behind you, eh? That is the beauty of being a bachelor like me. No harrowing partings and that sort of thing—no one to mind whether I come back or not.’

‘Oh,’ returned Delane, evasively, ‘it

isn't that. I am a bit out of sorts, but I think it's my liver.'

'Oh, well,' rejoined the other, 'that will get a good shaking up. I see there's a gale predicted, and I daresay you'll be in the full swing of it this time to-morrow. I'm not very fond of the sea myself. I prefer what the modern Mrs. Malaprop calls *terra cotta*. Come and have a smoke. I've got some A1 cigars, and I'll give you one to try.'

But the tobacco did not have its usual soothing effect upon Captain Delane, and even as he smoked it, he remained somewhat glum and thoughtful.

Presently his friend, wishing to supply a further distraction, proposed a visit to the Empire, but Delane declined.

'No,' he said, 'I am not in the vein, and I think I'll turn in early to-night.'

‘Good-bye then, old chap,’ returned the other. ‘Good luck, a pleasant journey and a safe return.’

When, however, his friend left him, Delane did not turn in, but betook himself to the reading-room where he was not likely to be interrupted, and continued his reflections. He hated the thought of having parted on bad terms with the wife whom he had loved passionately, and still loved fondly. For months past he had been heaping up causes of complaint against her in his heart, but somehow to-night they seemed to have dwindled away almost to nothing. He could not deny that she had always been most generous to him about money matters, always wanting to heap him with gifts with a persistence that had sometimes vexed him. And to-night, even though she had been

proud and arrogant in her manner, he could not forget that she had flung herself upon his breast, saying that it would kill her, would break her heart to part from him. It was strange that the remembrance should move him more than the fact had done. And now he came to think of it, it was putting her in a painful and humiliating position to go off in that way, leaving her to invent what excuse she might to her servants and friends. He was not at all proud of himself, and this dissatisfaction made him very irritable. Well! it was no use being sorry now: the thing was done. But was it done? said a still, small voice which stung him as a gad-fly stings a horse. There was more than twelve hours before the train left; time enough to change his mind.

He did *not* want to change his mind;

the very thought that he might be tempted to almost maddened him. He grew so angry that he wished he had never married her ; never set eyes on her : women were the curse of a man's life—always had been, always would be. ‘Suppose,’ whispered the infuriating gad-fly, ‘suppose you put off your journey for a week ; go down home, propitiate your wife, get her reconciled to the idea, and make your intention public property?’

This suggestion so exasperated him that he bounded from his chair, and, going into the hall, put on his coat and hat. The hall-porter looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

‘Ah,’ he said to himself, ‘my lady’s been giving him what for, or I’m a Dutchman. I hope he don’t find out about that tenner, or he’ll make it hot for me!’

The night was cold and uninviting, but Captain Delane, instead of turning in, walked down Piccadilly, Knightsbridge as far as Kensington. He wanted to walk off his irritation, but met with very poor success. The gad-fly kept on at him, and, after he had walked four miles, got the better of him. He went to bed in despair, telling himself that he would sleep on it. He, however, found it extremely difficult to sleep at all, and only did so by fits and starts, and every time he woke from a troubled doze, the gad-fly was at him again. When the tardy daylight peeped in at the window he found, to his intense annoyance, that something stronger than he had spoiled his plans, and that, after all, he was not going on this much desired journey; at all events not to-day. Having made up his mind, he turned over,

and for the first time fell into a sound sleep which lasted a couple of hours. His body was refreshed, but he was in an exceedingly evil frame of mind and wanted a victim. Yes, he was going home, like the fool he was, to his wife's apron-string, and it was quite on the cards that she would attribute his submission to her threats and his own mercenary fears. He ground his teeth (by the way, I presume this is a metaphor, for I never knew anyone actually to grind his teeth in a rage) and used shocking language all the time he was dressing, but even that usually sweet solace did not yield him much comfort. At ten o'clock he sat down to breakfast at his club; just at the time when Ethel, in happy excitement, was rushing about making preparations for her journey. Now had his pride and his temper per-

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mitted him to send a line to the Albe-marle, saying, 'I am not going after all, and will come round to you as soon as I have had my breakfast,' how much suffering would have been spared them both! But, in that case, Fate would have been deprived of a capital joke. He ate his breakfast, read the paper, and presently tardily wrote out a telegram to his wife:

'Journey postponed. Home by 5.30 train.'

He never doubted that she would return at once to the Manor House, eager to confide her woes and wrongs to Mrs. Tower. He telegraphed thus early in order to prevent her from doing this.

When at 5.30 he reached the station, he was surprised and annoyed to find no carriage of any sort awaiting him, and came to the uneasy conclusion that perhaps, after all, she had not returned home. It

would be a confounded nuisance, he thought, if she had gone to her Aunt Mary with the tale of her supposed wrongs. It was a small station; no vehicle was to be had unless ordered, so there was nothing for him but to walk the mile and a half to the Manor House.

And now it will be desirable to change the scene once more and look in upon Mrs. Tower, as she sits over the drawing-room fire with an open letter in her lap and a look of complete mystification on her pretty face. It is just half-an-hour since Ethel's missive was put into her hands. In the natural order of things she ought to have received it two hours earlier, but, in the absence of his lady, the second footman who fetched the letters from the village post-office, had thought it quite

unnecessary to hurry himself, and had spent a considerable time in making calls upon various neighbours. As Mrs. Tower read, her amazement continued to grow, and at the conclusion she became aware that her jaw had dropped nearly an inch and a half. What in the name of all that was most extraordinary and inconceivable could it mean? Ethel, who hated the sea, who was accustomed to every comfort and luxury, who never did a hand's turn for herself; who was keenly alive to public opinion and a great stickler for the proprieties of life, to fly off to America at a moment's notice without a maid, without luggage, without a word of warning to anyone! That it was a determination taken at a moment's notice, she could not doubt. But why this wild rush! why not wait a few days and do the thing

comfortably and respectably ! Her letter contained no explanation of why she was taking this strange step, but simply conveyed the intelligence of the fact. What was Captain Delane thinking of to allow her to do such a mad thing ! Then it occurred to her that it was hardly probable that he also was going on the spur of the moment, and a suspicion, not very wide of the truth, flashed across her mind. Ethel had discovered that her husband was going to America, and had determined to go with him. Hence her sudden departure ; hence the pretext of Aunt Mary's illness, which, now Nelly thought of it, she did not for a moment believe in. There was some strange mystery, and she felt slightly irritated with her friend for not trusting her with a little more clue to it. And yet, as a rule, no woman could

be more considerate; it was entirely unlike her to treat even so intimate a friend in this cavalier manner. Well, there was nothing for her to do but to go back home on the morrow after her brief and solitary visit and await developments, but she felt it incumbent on her friendship to make the best of things to Mrs. Delane's household and friends. What on earth she was to say that would seem in the very least degree plausible she was at her wit's end to conjecture, and, at this moment, she was earnestly seeking inspiration from the glowing fire whose flaming heart she was searching. She had not yet found it when the sound of the door opening with some violence caused her to turn her head.

‘Good Heavens!’ she cried, as Captain Delane came towards her. ‘Here is another surprise—a very welcome one too,’

and she gave him her hand, looking unfeignedly pleased. ‘And so you two mad people have thought better of it?’

He stared at her.

‘What do you mean?’ he said.

‘What do I mean?’ she echoed, in surprise. ‘What does anything mean? What does this letter of Ethel’s mean?’ and she pointed to the open sheet on her lap.

‘May I look?’ he asked, hurriedly; and, without even waiting for her consent, he took it up and began to read.

Nelly was almost frightened at the expression of his face as he read.

‘Good God!’ he cried, when he had mastered the first few lines, and ‘Good God!’ he repeated, much more forcibly, as he concluded. ‘But this is too awful!’ and he looked at Nelly as though he had seen a ghost.

‘What is too awful?’ she cried, terrified by his look; ‘for Heaven’s sake, tell me at once.’

Captain Delane passed his hand across his brow.

‘I feel as if I should go out of my senses,’ he said, and he took two or three hasty turns up and down the room. Presently he came back to where Mrs. Tower was sitting.

‘It is no use telling half-truths,’ he began. ‘I must tell you everything.’

She looked at him with a white, frightened face, but remained silent.

‘I had made up my mind to go to America,’ he went on. ‘For some months I have felt things were not going as I liked: my position had become intolerable to me. I seemed to be sinking into the rôle of Mrs. Delane’s husband, and

that contemptible sort of part did not suit me at all. I thought,' hesitating, 'she ought to have shown more delicacy, more consideration for me, and I resented her not doing so. A fortnight ago I heard of something in America out of which I fancied money was to be made, and I determined to go over and see for myself.'

'Without saying a word to Ethel?' inquired Nelly, her eyes and voice displaying unmistakeable disapproval.

'Yes,' he answered, reluctantly. 'There I own I was wrong; but I knew she would make the most violent objections, and I wished to avoid a painful scene.'

Mrs. Tower's face became still more expressive.

'I see what you think,' he said, uneasily; 'I think so myself now. Well, I knew you were coming to stay with her,

and on Monday I wrote a letter, addressed to you here, telling you all about it, and asking you to break it to her gently.'

'To me!' cried Nelly.

'Yes, and it seems that, as ill-luck would have it, you had neuralgia in your eyes, and got her to read your correspondence.'

The memory of the letter in the illiterate hand flashed across Nelly's mind.

'Was it in your writing?' she asked.

'No, I got a girl in a shop to direct it. Of course, the moment she became aware of my intention, she rushed off to London to look for me, and found me at my club about six o'clock. I went to the hotel with her, and we had a very stormy scene—she insisted on my giving up the idea, and I—well, I would not. And so we parted not very good friends. She would

not listen to reason, and I was too proud to give in. And I thought,' hesitating, 'it was more hurt vanity with her than anything else, and the idea of what people would say.'

'It did not occur to you, I suppose,' remarked Mrs. Tower, drily, 'that you could not possibly humiliate a woman more than by deserting her in that way, and leaving her to make the best she could of it to everyone? Upon my word, I think i my husband had behaved like that to me I should never have wanted to set eyes on him again.'

Captain Delane groaned.

'I see now,' he said, 'that I have behaved like a brute. Well, after I left her, I felt very uncomfortable, and all the evening I kept on getting worse, and at last, although it was an awful pill, I made

up my mind to put off my journey for a week, at any rate.'

'And did you not send round, the first thing in the morning, to tell her so?'

'No, worse luck. I wired here about midday to say I was returning. I made up my mind she would come straight back here.'

'It is the most dreadful thing I ever heard,' broke in Nelly. 'I suppose, poor dear, when she found she could not prevail upon you to stop, she made up her mind to go with you. And there she is, probably, without a creature she ever saw before, dreadfully ill of course, no maid, no clothes, no comforts of any sort, for she could not have had time to get anything. It will kill her.'

Captain Delane groaned aloud.

'Oh, for God's sake,' he cried. 'don't

make me worse than I am already. You don't know the hell I am going through. But surely,' brightening, 'surely, when she got on board and found I was not there, she would come off again at once?'

'No,' returned Mrs. Tower; 'for the very first thing she would have done in that case would have been to telegraph to me, to prevent my leaving here or saying anything to the servants.'

'I must go back to London at once,' he cried, starting up, 'and find out all I can. I think there is a slow train about eight.'

'There is nothing to be done to-night,' replied Mrs. Tower, decidedly. 'The best thing will be to stop and cut and dry all your plans, and consider what is to be done.'

'I shall go after her, of course,' he re-

turned; 'the Cunard boats always leave on Saturday.'

'And perhaps she will cross you on the way coming back,' suggested Mrs. Tower.

'Oh, no, I must cable to some one in New York to meet her when she arrives. I do not quite know how to manage it at present, but I shall find that out to-morrow.'

'Of course,' said Nelly, 'there is just an off-chance that, not finding you on the ship, she may have come off again, and, wanting to punish you, may have gone to Aunt Mary, thinking it just as well to let you be a little bit uncomfortable. But I do not think it—it would not be like her. I suppose,' she added, shooting an indignant glance at him, for she was very fond of Ethel, and dreadfully concerned at the thought of her possible sufferings, 'I sup-

pose, after this, you will no longer doubt your wife's affection ?'

He hid his face in his hands.

'Oh,' he cried, 'please God to let me get her back again, I will devote all my life to making up to her for this.'

'But now,' interrupted Mrs. Tower, somewhat unfeelingly, 'if she has gone, what on earth are we to say to people, to the servants ?'


'I cannot think,' he returned, miserably. 'I feel as if my head was made of wood. Oh,' looking at her imploringly, 'do think of something ; women are always so much better at this sort of thing than men.'

'Well,' returned Nelly, 'for the present we must keep up the fiction about Aunt Mary's illness, and perhaps in the night we may be visited by some inspiration. To-morrow morning I must return home.'

‘Oh, no,’ he entreated; ‘for pity’s sake don’t leave me at this awful crisis. In any case, wait until Friday. I shall go to London by the first train to-morrow, and, as soon as I have made all my arrangements, I will come back here and talk matters over with you.’

Here the gong sounded, and they separated to dress for dinner.

Great was the curiosity in the servants’ hall to know what was ‘up.’ That something unusual had happened was not to be doubted for a moment, seeing the perturbed faces, the failing appetites, and the disjointed conversation of Captain Delane and Mrs. Tower. But, conjecture as they might, they found it impossible to arrive at any conclusion whatever. After dinner the pair held a long consultation, and finally it was decided that if the morning



brought no letter from Ethel, they must make up their minds that she was on the way to America. The post-bag was to be taken to Captain Delane the instant it arrived—if it should contain a letter from Ethel to her friend, he was authorised to open and read it. If there was no letter, he would go to London by the 9.15 train.

‘You will send me a wire the instant you discover anything,’ urged Nelly.

‘Well, no,’ he returned. ‘You see in a little place like this it would not be safe.’

‘Ah, I forgot,’ she returned. ‘Still it is very easy to telegraph something that will not give occasion for gossip. If she has gone, wire, “*Aunt Mary worse*”—if not, “*Aunt Mary better*.”’

So it was settled, and they parted, both feeling wretched and disconsolate.

Mrs. Tower's sensations, however, were not to be named in the same mouth with those of Captain Delane, who was a prey to such remorse and wretchedness as he had never in his life known before. He could see now that his wife was an angel, and that he was an utter brute. He remembered with dreadful pangs all her tender, loving ways, her generosity, her thousand good qualities. He had not known until now how he loved her and how insupportable life would be without her. He could remember all her acts of kindness now it was too late. Ah! why could he not have thought of them sooner, instead of piling up all those stupid, petty little grievances which seemed so contemptible now. The pendulum had swung back, and he saw everything in a different light. As he paced his room, a prey to

wretched thoughts, a sudden blast of wind shook the window, and added the poignant recollection of her probable sufferings to his other tortures. How ill she was, poor darling, the last time they crossed from Calais to Dover. She had declared that another hour of it would have killed her. And she had faced the prospect of this misery, prolonged perhaps for days, rather than be parted from him. How she must have loved him! and he had been fool and brute enough to doubt her. But would not this dreadful experience change all her feelings: turn her love to hate and bitterness? Captain Delane was by no means a man given to nervous imaginings, but he began to think of stories he had heard of the dreadful sufferings of women from sea-sickness. He could not be quite sure, but he fancied

he had heard of a woman dying from it. If he had only gone by the White Star Line, as he had at first intended, Ethel could have landed at Queenstown, and there would not have been so much harm done; but now ten days at least must elapse before he could be with her, and what might she not have to go through in that time. It was two o'clock before he attempted to go to bed, and then only got fitful snatches of sleep, and awoke every time to that terrible memory which stabbed him like a dagger.

CHAPTER VI.

THE post-bag contained no letter from Ethel—that settled the matter. He went to London by the early train, and the butler told the other servants that the Captain looked awful, and he was sure something most dreadful had happened. Speculation was again rife—the maid said that if there was any gentleman she could have given a name to, she would have thought her lady had eloped; but this idea was universally scouted. There was no evidence either of the pair having quarrelled—the butler declared they had

‘kissed most affectionate’ on parting the previous Friday, when the captain left home. He could not be in such trouble because Mrs. Delane’s aunt was ill, and why should Mrs. Tower be so put out? Meantime, Captain Delane was pursuing his investigations. He ascertained from the North German Lloyd office that Mrs. Delane had taken a state cabin at the last moment. Then he went to the hotel, interviewed the manager, and learned that Mrs. Delane had left the previous morning at twenty minutes to eleven for Waterloo Station. She had written several letters the evening before, and entrusted them to him, saying that they were important. He thought they were principally to tradesmen. Had she any luggage? Captain Delane enquired. Yes, a new trunk that had come in that morning and a bag.

Captain Delane asked to see the chambermaid, and heard from her that the lady had been up and out early, and had sent in a lot of clothes which it had been quite a job to get packed in time. The lady had said she was going to America all of a sudden, and she seemed quite excited and pleased at the idea.

He had heard enough, and his heart was sick and sore. Then he got into his Hansom again, and was driven to the chambers of Ethel's family solicitor. The task before him was not a pleasant one.

Mr. Bryant was devoted to Ethel; he had managed all her affairs, and had been almost like a father to her. Captain Delane remembered how the old gentleman had looked on him with suspicion when he came wooing the young lady, and it was some time before he could be con-

vinced that his intentions were not of a mercenary nature. He felt exceedingly uncomfortable about the telling of his story, but he took all the blame upon himself, and would not even attempt to make the best of the matter. He could see by Mr. Bryant's pinched lips and deepening frown that he was passing the severest mental judgement on him, and, though in words the old gentleman said it was a most unfortunate affair, his look and tone spoke volumes.

'You can't blame me more than I blame myself,' Captain Delane said, humbly. 'Now the only thing is to find out what is best to be done.'

'I should like, if you please,' uttered Mr. Bryant, in a cold, stiff voice, 'to think the matter over alone. If you will be so good as to leave me now and return in an

hour's time, I will lay my ideas before you.'

Captain Delane went out and wandered miserably about for what seemed to him half a day, and returned punctually to the minute.

'I am in correspondence,' said Mr. Bryant, 'with a firm of solicitors in New York—one of them is known to me personally. I will cable him asking him to meet Mrs. Delane when the boat arrives. You will please communicate to me anything that you may wish him to say to her on your account. I will ask him to take rooms for her at the best hotel, and to see that she is thoroughly looked after and provided with every comfort.'

Captain Delane thanked him effusively, but the lawyer received these demonstrations very coldly and his client could see

that, although he did not absolutely refuse to shake hands with him, he only performed that ceremony with reluctance. At every moment Arthur Delane was becoming more and more conscious of the enormity of his own conduct, and he began to wonder how he could ever have conceived so hateful and abominable an idea as to leave his wife in such a manner. It was not as though she had committed any crime or offence against him for which it was right that she should receive punishment, the fault was in his own cursed, morbid pride. He drove to the office of the Cunard line, took his passage, and then bethought to telegraph '*Aunt Mary worse,*' which he had forgotten to do before. He had no other preparations to make, as all his things were already packed for the voyage, and he was desirous to get back

to Nelly to concert measures with her for the purpose of throwing dust in the eyes of the servants and the world at large. She met him at the station, being anxious for news, and he told her all that had happened, not forgetting to speak of Mr. Bryant's displeasure against him.

‘Well,’ said Nelly, tightening her lips, ‘I am not one of those people who like to hit a man when he is down, still, you must really not be surprised if Ethel’s friends cannot help showing that they think you have behaved very badly to her. What could you have done more if she had openly defied and insulted you before the servants, or carried on with another man under your nose?’

‘Yes,’ he answered, in a dejected tone, ‘I see it all now. I feel as if I wasn’t fit to live.’

‘ Well,’ pursued Nelly, slightly mollified, ‘ I hope that if you ever do come together again——’

‘ For God’s sake,’ he interrupted, ‘ don’t talk like that! What is to hinder our coming together again?’

‘ I don’t know,’ returned Nelly, dismally, ‘ when anyone belonging to me goes to America, or India, or Australia, I always make up my mind I shall never see them again. But now, what are we going to say to people?’

‘ God knows!’ he answered, in a melancholy voice. ‘ I don’t. I fancied you would have thought of something all this time. I don’t want to shield myself, Heaven knows! I am quite willing to have it published on the house-top that I am a brute and a blackguard, only that

she, poor darling, would so hate an *esclandre*.'

'Yes,' observed Nelly, drily. 'I almost wonder you did not think of that before.'

He made an impatient gesture.

'You need not keep on rubbing it in,' he cried. 'God knows I feel sore and bad enough already.'

'Very well,' she rejoined, more kindly. 'I won't say any more, since the Lord has already wreaked upon you that vengeance which is supposed to be especially His. Now I will set to work to think what lies we can tell, and I will not stick at them, however black they may be. For my own part I don't see a pin to choose between white lies and black ones. There would not be so much difficulty about the world at large—it is the servants of whom I am afraid.'

‘Hang the servants!’ cried Captain Delane.

‘Yes,’ answered Nelly, laughing, ‘if we could hang them, their suspended animation would be very convenient, and they would tell no tales. Ah! those were fine old times when people had power over the bodies and souls of their dependents. You can’t deceive servants, they are so dreadfully sharp, and all the time they are looking so respectful, and as if every word you said were gospel, they probably know everything you are trying to conceal from them, and often a good deal more than you know yourself. It is the business of their lives, it is a point of honour with them to know your affairs, and the moment you try to keep anything from them you lend a new zest and interest to their pursuit of knowledge. Now, what possible

reason can we give Ethel's maid that is in the very least plausible, why she should not require her services whilst she is staying in her aunt's large house, and still more for her remaining there three weeks without a change of clothes ?'

'No,' he answered, 'that won't work, and I would rather anyone knew the truth than Mrs. Onslow. She is so fond of Ethel, and she would never forgive me ; and, as she is a nice, kind woman, I would rather not have her bad opinion.'

'She will have to be told something,' returned Nelly, 'or, the first time her maid meets Ethel's, the murder will be out. Perhaps sooner, for they are rather friendly, and no doubt correspond.'

'Well,' uttered Captain Delane, hopelessly, 'it is no use my thinking—if I rack my brain till Doomsday I shall be no nearer.'

‘I will drop you at home,’ suggested Nelly, ‘and go for a drive all by myself, and perhaps Providence or His Satanic Majesty may send me an inspiration, for I suppose one cannot expect Providence to inspire one with a lie.’

‘Do, do!’ he entreated, ‘and I will be grateful to you all my life.’

‘Ah,’ she answered, smiling, ‘I know exactly the length, breadth, and depth of a man’s gratitude. It is intense whilst he is in a state of expectancy, and nil ever afterwards.’

‘Oh,’ he said, laughing, ‘you are thinking of quite a different case from this.’

‘No,’ she exclaimed, ‘I am thinking of every case in which a man swears to be grateful for the rest of his life.’

‘Try me,’ he urged.

‘Yes,’ she returned. ‘I will try you, and I shall not be at all surprised and disappointed when I find you wanting.’

Here they arrived at the park gates, and Captain Delane descended, whilst Mrs. Tower pursued her drive. On her return she went straight to his den.

‘You and Ethel,’ she said, throwing herself into a chair, ‘will both start for America to-morrow.’

‘Saturday,’ he interrupted.

‘No, to-morrow. You will go down to Liverpool and sleep there. It is a sudden freak on her part; she has been engaged these two days in making preparations. She did not take Davis to London with her because she wanted the matter kept a profound secret until she started, as she was afraid of Mrs. Onslow trying to dissuade her if she got any inkling of her

intention. She does not take Davis to America because they are both bad sailors, and she has engaged a travelling-maid. It is all hideously improbable; they won't believe it: but if you can find anything better, do. Perhaps, in talking it over, we may improve upon it; but, for general outline, I don't see that we can do better. I shall tell Davis point-blank that Mrs. Onslow's illness was imaginary, and that Ethel did not go to her at all; and I will, if you like, write to Mrs. Onslow and give her all sorts of affectionate messages and excuses from Ethel. Though, really and truly, as Heaven knows what may happen, I think it would be infinitely wiser to tell her the truth. She will be dreadfully upset at first, but she is a very good sort, and for Ethel's sake will make the best of things.'

Captain Delane looked unhappy and dissatisfied.

‘Yes,’ observed Nelly, ‘I know it is very lame and unsatisfactory, but find something better if you can.’

‘It seems so awfully improbable,’ he said, dejectedly.

‘Yes,’ she returned, ‘but not half so improbable as the actual truth. I defy you to beat that in fiction. It is no use—nothing on earth can make it plausible that Ethel should dash off to America in February at three days’ notice without a shadow of reason for doing so, when she has never expressed the smallest wish to go there, and hates the sea.’

‘Stay!’ he said, looking up with a flash of intelligence. ‘Why not tell half the truth? Why not say that I had to go to America on business; that I did not tell

her until a few days before I was to start, fearing it would upset her; and that the moment she discovered my intention she insisted on accompanying me?’

‘Yes,’ returned Nelly, heartily, ‘that is a much better idea than mine; I think that will do.’

‘But,’ he returned, modestly, ‘it was your idea that we are going together, and, after all, that gave me the clue, and is the most important point.’

‘Very well,’ said Nelly, ‘honours are divided. And now, please Heaven, to let all go well, and in, let me see, how many days? ten, or perhaps with luck nine, you will be folded in each other’s arms, and you will go to Niagara for your wedding trip, and have the most delightful honeymoon that ever was heard of.’

‘Please God it comes off all right,’ he

said, still looking dreadfully dejected. 'Poor darling! I wonder what is happening to her now. Mercifully the wind has gone down a bit. I only hope the stewardess is a nice woman—she can do more for Ethel than anyone else just now.'

'I cannot imagine,' remarked Nelly, perplexed, 'what account she will give of herself, or what reason she can invent for going such a journey alone.'

'Oh, Mrs. Tower!' groaned the young man, 'won't it make her hate me? Will she ever be able to forgive me?'

Nelly looked reflective.

'She never ought to,' she replied, 'but it is a peculiarity of our sex that the more we have to forgive a man, the more he becomes endeared to us. I can't think why it is, but there is no doubt that so it is.'

‘And to think,’ he ejaculated, miserably, ‘that I was such a blind fool as not to know her real value.’

‘Well,’ replied Mrs. Tower, ‘at all events there will be no excuse for your not knowing it in the future.’

‘I swear,’ he began ; but she interrupted him.

‘Do not swear. Vows taken in moments of great excitement are seldom kept.’

‘No,’ he said, ‘I will not swear. But you shall see.’

They took all the evening to mature their plans, and to arrange for possible contingencies. Mrs. Tower promised to break the news to the housekeeper as soon as Captain Delane had left next morning, and to write a similar version to Mrs. Onslow. Arthur was to cable to her the instant he arrived in New York, and had

seen Ethel, and they decided to be extremely cheerful at dinner for the benefit of the servants, in order that they might be led to believe that, if there had been anything amiss, it was all put straight now.

Next morning he departed at ten o'clock, and, half-an-hour later, Nelly sent a message to the housekeeper, requesting her presence in the drawing-room. The fact of their being old acquaintances made the task a little less unpleasant.

Mrs. Hawkins was not slow in obeying the summons. Not only was she burning with curiosity, but she was much attached to her young lady, with whom she had lived ten years.

Nelly smiled, and tried to look as bright as possible.

‘Well, Hawkins,’ she said, ‘I have some

strange news for you. I don't know what you will think of it.'

'It is nothing very bad, I can see by your face, ma'am, or you would not look so smiling. It is about Mrs. Delane, of course.'

'Yes. What do you say to her having taken it into her head to go to America?'

Hawkins turned quite pale.

'Lor', ma'am,' she exclaimed, 'you never mean to say such a thing!'

'Yes, I do. Don't look so frightened. A journey to America is nothing now-a-days.'

'But it's so sudden,' objected Hawkins. 'Why, the very thought quite takes my breath away.'

'Well, you see,' said Mrs. Tower, 'Captain Delane has to go there on business, and when he told Mrs. Delane she de-

clared she would not let him go alone, and you know, when she makes up her mind to a thing, it is not easy to turn her.'

'But Captain Delane hadn't ought to go if she didn't wish it. I don't hold with married gentlemen going away and leaving their wives. It used not to be done in my day.'

'But he was obliged to,' replied Nelly, finding herself compelled to defend his conduct.

'Well, I can't think what Mrs. Onslow 'll say, I am sure,' remarked Hawkins.

'That is just it,' said Nelly. 'She is not to know anything about it until they have started.'

'But fancy her not taking Davis. Poor thing, she will be in a way! She's quite upset as it is.'

'Oh,' replied Mrs. Tower, lightly, 'she


is very lucky to be out of it. She would be sure to be very ill.'

'But so is my poor young lady,' objected Hawkins. 'I know how bad she's been two or three times only just going across to Paris.'

'I believe that is the worst bit of sea in the whole world,' observed Nelly, with a view to comforting her. 'And in those large vessels the motion is not felt a quarter so much.'

'But she's never going alone, ma'am, with no one but the Captain to look after her? Men are poor creatures, I always think, when one is ill. They never know what to do.'

'I hope,' said Mrs. Tower, 'that Mrs. Delane will be able to get a nice travelling-maid. There is never any difficulty about it.'



Hawkins looked injured.

‘Well, ma’am, I must say I did not think Mrs. Delane would have gone off like that, without wishing any of us good-bye. It isn’t like her.’

‘I think,’ said Nelly, ‘that, when she left, she was not really sure that she was going, and Captain Delane is quite opposed to the idea.’

Hawkins sniffed. She would like to have spoken her mind about the gentleman—however, it was only a pleasure deferred, as she would have her say out as soon as she quitted the drawing-room.

‘Mrs. Delane will probably be back before a month,’ said Nelly, cheerfully, ‘and she has asked me to tell you that she wishes everything to go on just the same in her absence.’

And after a few more words she dismissed Hawkins, and went to prepare for her own journey.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN, after four-and-twenty hours, Mrs. Delane's physical sufferings began to abate, her mind had leisure and opportunity to dwell on her awful situation. For no word of meaner significance could express what it seemed to her. She, whose life had always been so tenderly guarded, who had been hedged round with care, affection, and kind observances, to find herself alone on the wide sea, without one human being to whom she could turn for sympathy—it seemed a fate of incredible cruelty and hardship. She was perfectly

aware that she would be an object of curiosity and suspicion to her shipmates, and the truth was so humiliating that it was next to impossible to tell it. That she was here in pursuit of a runaway husband, who would appear to have baffled her pursuit, was a position so galling to a proud spirit that the very memory of it caused her to tingle with shame. In her heart she believed that her husband had tardily repented of his intention of leaving her, and had given up his voyage in deference to her wishes. She was not altogether an unreasonable woman, and so she confessed to herself that it was impossible that he could have guessed her intention of following him, and must therefore not be held responsible for the catastrophe which the inspiration that had given her so much pleasure had brought about. But, all the

same, she felt very bitter against him, for it was his unfair and unkind behaviour in wishing to leave her that was the cause of her present hapless plight. The ignominy of her position in the eyes of her household, friends and neighbours, when they learned, as they could not help but learn, what had befallen her, added the sting of mortification to her other sufferings. To a proud woman, to have it known that she has run after a man, humbled herself for the sake of one who does not really love her, must, inevitably, be crushing. She would give worlds to know what was happening at the Manor House. Had Arthur returned there the following day? Had he found Nelly there? Did he suspect what had become of her, or was he still in ignorance of her fate? Perhaps Nelly had left the Manor House at once on getting

her letter; perhaps Arthur, ashamed of having given in to her, would keep aloof for some days, and so be absolutely ignorant of her absence from home. That was an appalling thought, for in that case he would be taking no steps to follow her or ameliorate her dreadful position. She wanted to think that he knew everything; that he was a prey to remorse; but, in reality, it seemed more probable that he would not care to proclaim his defeat by a speedy return home. The time crawled on, and it was nearly forty-eight hours since Mrs. Delane took possession of the cabin which she had not quitted for an instant. The confined space, the solitude, had become intolerable to her, and she longed for air. She felt too that she must seek some distraction from her wretched reflections, and when on the

second morning the stewardess urged her to go up on the promenade deck, she was only too glad to yield to the suggestion. The wind and the sea had gone down, and there was comparatively little motion; still, when she tried to rise and dress, she found the task neither easy nor pleasant. At last, however, it was accomplished, and taking the arm of the stewardess she proceeded to the deck-chair which had been placed in a sheltered spot for her. No sooner was she settled than she felt better for the air, and began to look about her with a certain amount of interest. Not far from her were a couple engaged in a desperate flirtation—beyond them was a very sad-looking young widow with a delicate little boy—several men were pacing the deck, some briskly, some with a dejected air, and two young ladies in

very masculine and nautical attire, who talked loudly and affected a great independence of manner, were among the promenaders. As Ethel furtively watched her fellow-passengers, she was struck by one whose appearance distinguished him from the rest. He was a tall, fine-looking man, with a face which, if not exactly handsome, was extremely attractive, and whose charm lay more in its frank and kindly expression than in exact regularity of feature. Mrs. Delane decided that he was a soldier. Two or three times as he passed her their eyes had met, and each had withdrawn the gaze at once, only to resume it when opportunity occurred. There was a touch of cold in the wind, and Mrs. Delane's rug, though fairly thick, did not keep it out quite as well as she could have desired. That the stranger

remarked this became evident from the fact that, after a short absence from the deck, he returned bearing a much heavier one. He approached Mrs. Delane without any appearance of shyness, and, raising his cap, asked if she would allow him to put it round her. Ethel was too well-bred a woman not to receive a courtesy in the spirit in which it was offered, and accepted the rug with thanks.

‘The wind is very fresh,’ she remarked, with a smile, ‘and I was just meditating whether I could find some one to send to the stewardess for another wrap.’

He still lingered, and asked how she had borne the first part of the voyage, and Ethel found it an unspeakable relief to have some one with whom to exchange a few words. An unoccupied deck-chair stood near, and presently he asked if she

would allow him to take it for a few minutes, or whether she preferred to be left to her own meditations. She gave a cordial assent, and soon they were chatting in quite a friendly manner. He took an early opportunity of telling her his name and the object of his trip to America. His name was Clarendon, he had formerly been in the Household Cavalry, and was now on his way to Washington to visit a sister married to an American who had a large interest in railways and was president of one of the leading lines. Ethel remembered to have heard Nelly speak in favourable terms of a Captain Clarendon whom she had met in a country house, and asked if he were acquainted with that little lady. It turned out that he was, and then Ethel made the usual remark as

to the smallness of the world, and friendly relations were at once established.

She said not one word about the object of her own visit to America, and her companion, whatever he may have felt, did not betray the least curiosity on the subject. When luncheon-time approached, he suggested that she should partake of it in the saloon, rather than on deck, and proposed that she should occupy a seat which was vacant next his own. Ethel was only too glad to acquiesce. She had had quite enough of her own society, and was more than thankful for a distraction. An hour ago she had never seen this man, and now he seemed like an old friend. He gave her his arm to go below, for she had not yet got her sea-legs, waited on her with great care and kindness at luncheon, and

took her back to her chair afterwards. The stewardess, who had been twice to look for her, seemed relieved to find her own responsibility lightened, and Mrs. Delane told her, with perhaps not very strict adherence to truth, that Captain Clarendon was an old acquaintance. Later in the afternoon, he persuaded her to take a turn, and she went with him to look at the steerage passengers, who were enlivening the time by songs and dances. Then they stood for a long time by the bulwarks, looking over the side at a shoal of porpoises racing the ship, and indulging in uncouth but diverting gambols. Then he showed her the gulls following the ship, and ever and again, as the remains of food were cast out through the kitchen port-holes, swooping down to their meal.

Ethel became quite cheerful, and almost

forgot her troubles. Every moment she felt her confidence in her companion growing, and gradually she resolved to confide her terrible dilemma to him ; at least, with certain reservations. There was no necessity to tell him everything—indeed, it would not be desirable. When they had made their tour, and he had put her back in her chair and carefully wrapped her up, she said, with a vivid blush,

‘I daresay you wonder what I am doing here all alone?’

‘Indeed, no,’ he answered ; ‘I have no curiosity on the subject, and am quite content to be thankful to the gods for sending you in the same ship with myself without wanting to know the reason of the dispensation.’

But, as a matter of fact, he was exceedingly puzzled how it came that a

woman of good position and means—for Ethel had by this time told him the name of her place and county—could be doing here alone without even a maid.

‘It is a very strange story,’ she pursued, still showing signs of embarrassment, ‘and has really been a terrible experience.’

‘Now, please,’ urged Hugo Clarendon, gently, ‘do not think it necessary to give me any explanation. There must be excellent reasons for your being here since you are here, but there is not the smallest necessity for you to communicate them to me, nor to anyone else.’

‘I think,’ returned Ethel, ‘I should be happier if I told you, and I am quite sure,’ with great emphasis, ‘that you will consider my confidence sacred.’

‘You may be quite sure of that,’ he returned, heartily.

Ethel had made up her mind just how much she would tell him. She would not tell him that her husband had been touchy about money matters, nor that the money was hers, not his, nor would she tell him of that scene in the hotel where she had implored Arthur not to leave her, and he remained obdurate—it hurt her pride too much, so she concocted a neat little story which was sufficiently correct for its purpose. She would not, however, tell it quite in cold blood, and as she proceeded, occasional changes of colour and quiverings of the voice betrayed her emotion. Clarendon listened with the profoundest interest, his eyes fixed on her face except at such times when she evinced deeper emotion, and then he carefully looked out to sea.

‘My husband,’ said Ethel, ‘wanted to

go to America to see about a ranche of which he had been told. I did not like the idea of his going. I daresay,' apologetically, 'it was foolish of me, but I have a horror of long journeys, and always imagine if anyone I care for goes far away I shall never see him again.'

'I think,' smiled Clarendon, 'that is not an altogether uncommon weakness of your sex.'

'I tried,' pursued Ethel, 'to persuade him not to go, but he laughed at me and said he should be back again before I had time to miss him.'

Then she paused, rather at a loss how to adapt her story.

'I am afraid,' she went on, 'I have been rather spoiled. I like to have my own way, and I take it rather badly when I am contradicted.'

‘By that,’ he remarked, ‘I should suppose that you are an only child.’

Yes,’ she answered, smiling. ‘But I have known wilful people who had brothers and sisters.’

‘So have I,’ he laughed. ‘The worst I ever knew was one of ten.’

Ethel continued her story.

‘After he left me I felt more nervous and wretched than ever at the thought of the separation. Then I took a sudden resolution. Without a word to Mrs. Tower, who was staying with me, or the servants, I went up to London under the pretext of going to see an aunt who was ill. I took my passage, got everything that I thought absolutely necessary for the voyage, made myself quite unrecognisable, and came on board, determined that my husband should know nothing of this

escapade until we were fairly out at sea. Can you imagine,' and Ethel gazed at her companion with a whole tragedy in her eyes, 'can you imagine my horror when on sending the steward in search of my husband, he returned to say that he was not on the ship?'

'Good God!' cried Clarendon, looking very much moved. 'What had happened to him?'

'That is just it,' returned Ethel. 'I am in a state of the most terrible uncertainty. It is possible that, seeing how distressed I was at his going, he may have thought better of it; but then, on the other hand, an accident may have happened to him.'

'Oh, no,' returned Clarendon, cheerfully, 'that is not at all likely. You may depend he could not make up his mind at the last to leave you.'

And, looking at this very handsome young lady whom he admired amazingly, he felt quite sure that was the correct explanation.

‘You may depend,’ he went on, ‘he knows the truth by now, and is having even a worse time than you. He will follow you by the Cunard boat to-morrow, and—let me see!—in eight days from this you will be laughing over the adventure together. Though, indeed,’ kindly, ‘it is no laughing matter for either of you just now.’

‘But,’ returned Ethel, looking troubled, ‘suppose he had given up his journey in deference to my wishes, he might, perhaps, be a little ashamed at having given way to me, and might not return for two or three days, in which case he would know nothing of what had happened.’

‘Oh,’ said Captain Clarendon, ‘that is not at all likely if he is a good fellow, as I have no doubt he is.’

‘He is proud,’ returned Ethel, doubtfully.

‘There is nothing,’ said Clarendon, ‘to be proud of in making a woman anxious and unhappy, though he might well be proud that you could not bear to be parted from him.’

He spoke simply, and not as though he were paying her a mere empty compliment.

‘I am afraid,’ she answered, ‘he will be more likely to think me tiresome and exacting.’

‘Not he,’ said Clarendon.

‘But,’ asked Ethel, anxiously, ‘what am I to do when I get to New York?’

‘You will find everything cut and dried. He will cable to some one to meet you

and look after you, and you will hear that he is following you by the Cunard boat.'

'But,' objected Ethel, 'I do not think he knows anyone in New York.'

'There will be no difficulty about that,' returned Clarendon. 'He has only to go to his lawyer, or some American agent in London, and they will cable to some one in New York—nothing could be simpler.'

Ethel felt relieved. She really had cause for deep thankfulness at having met with Captain Clarendon—the terrible feeling of loneliness no longer oppressed her. She was quite sure that he was very kind-hearted, and would take care of her.

'It seems such an awful experience,' she said, presently; 'the sort of thing that could only happen in a novel or a play.'

‘I know a real story something of the same nature,’ he remarked; ‘it happened to a merchant at Cork. He went to his office one morning as usual, and found a letter from a friend, saying he was starting for America, and asking him to see him off. The merchant started for Queens-town without saying a word to his clerks, and went on board. He and his friend got interested in conversation, did not notice when the whistle sounded for the tug to leave, and he had to go all the way out to America without any preparation, whilst his distracted wife and friends had not the faintest inkling of what had become of him until they got his cable from New York.’

‘How terrible for his poor wife!’ cried Ethel, in tones of deep concern. Then, after a minute’s pause, she went on—‘The

greatest trial to me is being by myself. I have never been alone in my life ; never taken the smallest journey, nor even been in a Hansom alone, and to feel that every hour is separating me further and further from everyone and everything I care for positively terrifies me. I might die, and no one be the wiser ;' and she looked piteously at him.

' It is one of the most distressing cases I ever heard,' he answered, with genuine sympathy ; ' but do, please, try not to have these unhappy thoughts. And let me assure you that, short as our acquaintance is, I am ready to do anything for you that a brother could do until you are joined by your husband or friends.'

He spoke in a tone which left no doubt of his sincerity, and his words took a load off Ethel's heart.

‘It is so inconvenient not having a maid,’ she confided to him. ‘I suppose it is very wrong to be so helpless, but I cannot even do my hair, and the stewardess with the best intentions has made a dreadful object of me.’

‘Really, now,’ returned Clarendon, looking with secret admiration at the thick coil of dark hair under her hat, ‘I think it looks very nice. But I daresay I am no judge.’

Ethel laughed almost gaily.

‘I suppose,’ she said, ‘I shall be able to get a maid in America for the return journey.’

‘There will be no difficulty about that,’ he replied.

The air was growing chilly, and Mrs. Delane, who could not yet trust to her own unaided steering powers, accepted

his escort to her state-room, promising however to put in an appearance at dinner.


‘Poor little woman!’ reflected Clarendon, when he was alone, ‘what a desperate adventure for her. By Jove! how fond she must be of her husband. I should not think he can be much of a fellow to propose leaving her in that sort of way.’ Then, animated by a new idea, he went in search of the Purser. ‘Do you happen to know,’ he asked this functionary, ‘if there is any young woman amongst the second-class passengers who would be willing or able to act as maid to a lady on board? There is one here who had to come away suddenly without, and would, I think, be very glad to supply the deficiency if she could.’

‘I rather fancy that we’ve got just the

person,' returned the Purser. 'There is a very nice, neat-looking young woman I was talking to this morning. She has been a maid, and is going out to join her brother in Canada. She is a capital sailor, and would be glad enough, I daresay, to earn a little pocket-money. Would you like to see her?'

Clarendon said he should very much, and accompanied the Purser to the second-class saloon.

He was extremely pleased with the girl's manner and appearance, and had another proof of the world's smallness by discovering that she had been maid to the wife of one of his former brother-officers. In confirmation of this she produced a gold watch, on which was inscribed the words, 'To Annie Grant from Mrs. Seymour.'



The girl expressed her perfect willingness to wait upon Mrs. Delane, and Captain Clarendon arranged that she should have an interview with that lady after dinner, should she desire it.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT dinner Hugo Clarendon told Mrs. Delane of his interview with Annie Grant. She was delighted, and thanked him cordially.

‘But,’ he said, ‘you must see her first. A man is not always a good judge about ladies’-maids,’ smiling, ‘and you may not be so much prepossessed with her as I am.’

‘I am quite content to go by your opinion,’ answered Ethel, brightly; ‘and, after all, it is only for such a very little time.’ Then, her brow clouding, ‘There

is one thing that rather troubles me. What excuse can I possibly make to her for the position in which I am ?'

'Do not make any,' he answered, shortly; 'it is no one's concern but your own.'

'But you do not know,' she said, with a little blush, which he thought infinitely becoming, 'how very awkward I feel. It seems to me as if everyone on the ship, the stewardess included, looks askance at me.'

'I will tell you what,' he exclaimed, with an inspiration. 'Say you are going to join your husband in America. That is the most natural thing in the world.'

'But,' she objected, a little anxiously, 'that would not account for my being without a maid.'

Clarendon smiled.

'I believe,' he said, 'there are many

charming ladies who are obliged to go about the world without that luxury.'

'Of course,' she assented. 'Yes, that will do capitally. And as, I suppose, she will leave me as soon as we arrive, and I shall get another, that will simplify matters.'

After dinner, the interview took place to the mutual satisfaction of the parties.

When Ethel was tucked up in her berth that night she could scarcely realise that she was the same being as the wretched, despairing woman who had lain there only twelve hours before. Her fears, her gloom were gone; everything took a rosy colour—it was going to be a delightful adventure, and the result she foresaw was a triumphant renewing of love and clearing off of all misunderstandings with Arthur. Yes, Kismet, Fate, Destiny, Providence,

call it by what name you will, had especially intervened in her behalf; and, though the way had at first seemed 'sore and steep,' Heaven's gate and the roses of Paradise were at the summit. She gave ungrudgingly to her new friend the honour due to the *Deus ex machina* who had worked the change as though with a magician's wand, and he occupied the most exalted place in her regard. He was her mainstay, prop, counsellor, comfort, guide, philosopher, and friend; he was *almost* the nicest man she had ever met; he was so kind, so good-looking (better than handsome), and he was as thoughtful and considerate as a woman—well! the typical woman. Ethel slept like a baby (typical again), and woke bright, cheerful, refreshed. She was delighted with her maid, who showed herself a perfect mis-

tress of her craft, and dressed Mrs. Delane's hair so beautifully and becomingly that Davis would have turned green with envy had she known. Ethel was very much more careful over her toilette this morning, and appeared on deck with the little calm, triumphant air of a pretty woman who knows that she is looking her best. Hugo Clarendon's eyes might have been a mirror to her had she not already consulted one, and his first words spoke volumes.

'I need not ask if the new maid is a success,' he said, as he took her hand.

'She is a perfect treasure.' returned Ethel, 'and I owe her to you, as indeed,' prettily, 'I owe my entire change from wretchedness to well-being. I am more grateful than any words can express.'

'And what am I to say to you?' he

laughed. 'This time yesterday I was bored to death, and now I have a new interest in life, and shall be quite sorry when the voyage comes to an end.'

The sun shone brilliantly; the air was deliciously fresh without being cold, and they paced the deck, Ethel, somewhat to her companion's regret, being able to do without the support of his arm. They chatted gaily about all manner of things, and Hugo, discovering that she sang, made her promise to sing to him some time when the music-room might happen to be untenanted. This occurred the very same afternoon. Ethel had a very sweet contralto voice and the command of great pathos, and her auditor sat entranced as the lovely harmony fell on his enchanted ear. His reflections for the rest of the day were more centred on the folly and

wickedness of her husband, than even on her own charms and graces.

‘ Ah !’ he said to himself, with a mighty sigh, ‘ if I had a wife like that, I should be the happiest fellow alive.’ And yet he had not the smallest idea that he was on the verge of breaking the tenth commandment.

The evening was so mild that he persuaded Mrs. Delane to go on deck after dinner. It was a lovely moonlight night—she had long since lost all unpleasant sensations induced by the motion ; the air braced and invigorated her, and she was in the best possible spirits. It is to be presumed that, although her lawful husband might have been intensely relieved to know that his anxiety about her was now absolutely groundless, he might not have been altogether enchanted could he

have known under what agreeable conditions she was performing her voyage. But, as a matter of fact, he need have had no uneasiness, for Ethel was a true woman, and a true woman has only room for one man in her heart, and does not even think of flirting with another when she fondly loves one. She took the greatest, the friendliest pleasure in Hugo's society, was willing to consider him, in spite of their short acquaintance, the very best friend she had in the world, but that was the limit. She had not even the vaguest idea that he and she were the objects of considerable curiosity and interest, not untinged by scandal, to their fellow-passengers, for people are rarely conscious when perfectly innocent.

Captain Clarendon had not, however, the safeguard of another love to make

him impervious to Mrs. Delane's attractions, and he began to feel that although it would be a terrible wrench when the time came for bidding her farewell, it might be just as well for his own ultimate peace of mind. He, being a true man and a good fellow, liked and admired her all the more because there was not a trace of coquetry in her manner to him—she behaved, he thought, like the charming, natural, unaffected lady that she was.

As they sat in the moonlight, he was moved to tell her of an episode in his own life.

She asked him if he had not regretted leaving his regiment.

'Yes,' he answered: 'it is the one regret of my life—one that I can never quite succeed in forgetting. I loved the life—I loved the regiment, and hoped that

some day I might command it. But,' lowering his voice and looking away to sea, 'there was a time in my life when I had an even stronger attraction. I fell in love. It was just before I went to Egypt in '84, and I proposed on the eve of starting and was accepted. Perhaps you will hardly remember, but those we left behind had rather an anxious time about us that winter, and the girl I was engaged to declared on my return that she would never expose herself to the risk of going through such an experience a second time, and made her marriage with me conditional on my leaving the service.'

'I can quite understand,' murmured Ethel. 'I think if my lover or husband went to the wars, I should go mad with terror and anxiety. How *do* women bear these things!'

Hugo smiled.

‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘the anxiety is measured by the love.’

‘And perhaps,’ she rejoined, ‘a little by the nerves of the woman. But are men never anxious? If you adored a woman and knew her to be in deadly peril, could you eat and sleep and smile as if all was sure to be well?’

‘God alone knows what I should do!’ he answered. ‘I think I should try to get to her somehow.’

‘That is just it!’ exclaimed Ethel, ‘we unhappy women have to sit at home, and wait, and think, and break our hearts. There is relief in any kind of action, but to possess one’s soul in patience is the hardest thing of all. Then reverting to his story—‘And did you marry her?’ she asked, in an interested tone.

‘No,’ he said, in a low, sad voice. ‘I sent in my papers, the wedding-day was fixed, and just a fortnight before we were to have been married, she was thrown from her horse, dragged and killed.’ He put his hands before his face for a moment.

‘It is years ago,’ he said, withdrawing them, ‘but I cannot speak of it even to this day—I was left utterly stranded.’

‘Oh,’ uttered Ethel, in tones of deepest sympathy, ‘poor, poor you! I am so sorry that I should have reminded you of it.’

‘It was so awful,’ he went on, ‘not only in its suddenness, but she was so lovely, and—and—her poor face was crushed out of all resemblance, and I!—my God!—I was there!’

He rose abruptly, went to the ship’s

side, and stood looking into the sea without seeing it.

One of Ethel's best attributes was her intense sympathy with suffering, mental or physical. It is a mistake to suppose that only they who have suffered can thoroughly compassionate or feel for souls in distress. She was gifted too with tender intuitions as to the treatment of suffering, and had not that false shyness which sometimes prevents kind-hearted people from showing tokens of sympathy. After a minute she rose and followed him ; stole a kind little hand in his, and pressed it softly.

Her simple action touched him, and he returned her pressure heartily.

‘ I am all right again,’ he said. ‘ It does not often come back to me now, thank God ; when I think of her,’ in a reverent

tone, 'I think of her as an angel in Heaven.'

'Yes,' answered Ethel, 'that is the right way to think of her. I have often thought it a happy fate to die young, before one had time to suffer or sin, or have one's illusions destroyed.'

'And yet,' answered Hugo, cheerfully, 'life is a good thing when one has health and the means of enjoying it. I know well the joy of living! There are days when only to be alive seems enough in itself.'

Ethel gave a little sigh.

'Oh!' she said, 'but do not you think there is a great deal of disappointment even for those who have a fair share of the world's good gifts? One always seems just to fall short of happiness, to be half a note flat of the pitch of expectation; to

be always having it proved to one that nothing is quite what one thought or hoped it was.'

'I think,' he answered, 'when that is the case, it is because people have pitched their expectations a note too high—they are generally people of a romantic and idealistic temperament.'

'Yes,' assented Ethel. 'I think you are right. I always had such exalted ideas as a child, and realities generally shocked my sensibilities. The commonplace revolts me, and when I have dreamed, the awakening hurts me.'

Her tone was pensive, and she looked out seawards with eyes in which he saw two luminous tears.

'She is thinking of love,' he said to himself, 'and she is disappointed in her

husband. Ah! I felt sure there was something wrong about him.'

Neither spoke for a few minutes. Presently Ethel turned to him with a smile.

'It is the moon,' she said. 'It always gives me a half-melancholy, half-yearning feeling as though there were some great happiness to be had if one only knew where to look for it.'

'I think,' he replied, gravely, 'that it is not to be had alone. There must be some one to share it. You can only know it when you look upon a lovely scene or hear lovely music with your hand in the hand of the one being who is all in all to you; to whom you are all in all.'

'Ah!' she said, with a long sigh, 'then you know it?'


‘I have known it,’ he answered.

‘And you will again,’ she said, gently.
‘For your sake, I hope so. It is the very best thing in the world.’

He looked at her, but did not reply. He was thinking that he could imagine conditions under which he might renew the experience of the past, but he would have been extremely sorry if she had possessed the gift of reading his thoughts. After a time they went below, and had a game of picquet before parting for the night.

The weather continued fair and the sea smooth, and Mrs. Delane found herself really enjoying the voyage to which she had looked forward with such terror and anguish. Once now and then a misgiving about Arthur would smite her, but Clarendon was so cheerily confident that all

would be well; that, at that moment, her husband was following swiftly on her track, and would be in New York three days, perhaps two, after herself—that she became converted to his views. She was secretly pleased to believe that Arthur must be suffering anxiety and remorse on her account, and she was glad to think he could not possibly know how very much better matters were going with her than could reasonably have been supposed. She had no intention of telling him, although she meant to expatiate thankfully upon all Clarendon's kindness. And it would be impossible, she felt, to exaggerate her sufferings for the first forty-four hours. She was delighted with her maid, who was a bright, intelligent creature with charming manners, and amused Ethel greatly with the humours of the second-class and



steerage contingent. She spoke without reserve of her past, and her anticipations for the future. She had been attached to Mrs. Seymour and reluctant to leave her, but having received several urgent letters from her only brother, who was doing extremely well in Canada, to join him, she had at last made up her mind to comply; the more readily as she was anxious to break with a young man to whom she was engaged, who was addicted to the curse of English men-servants, drink. She had been fond of him, but she knew there could be no happiness or security in such a marriage, and so had resolved to get right away from him. Ethel, whose weakness we know it was to be a little autocratic and imperious, was always kind and considerate to those who served her, and Grant became quite attached to her in a day or

two. Here, on board ship, Mrs. Delane's little weakness was altogether in abeyance. She was dependent, yielding, confiding; a thoroughly charming and attractive woman. She liked herself infinitely better under these conditions—it was always the softer graces that she admired in her own sex, and she loved to depend on the strength and protection of a man. Hugo's thousand little cares and attentions were delightful to her, and she wished more than once, with a deep sigh, that Arthur had the same nice, tender ways. But he had always, even in his most affectionate moods, been undemonstrative and unprodigal of small attentions. It might be that his pride revolted against being thought to toady or wish to propitiate his wife as she held the purse. Whatever the cause might be, Ethel had often

deplored the fact. I suppose there are some hard, half-unsexed beings who scoff at and profess independence of kind, tender little cares from men, but they are not womanly women, and Ethel was essentially that.

She was blissfully unconscious of the fact that her shipmates made remarks not altogether charitable about her and Clarendon—even had she been aware of it, she would probably have been calmly and imperially indifferent to the fact. Clarendon knew it, and was a good deal embarrassed and annoyed by it. But what could he do? He would certainly not affront Mrs. Delane by suggesting the idea—it would be an odious impertinence, he thought, knowing, in her perfect purity of mind and conduct, how little she could comprehend the suspicions and imaginings

of vulgar people ; and though he cared as much for her reputation as every gentleman at heart does for that of a woman whom he likes and who depends on him, he did not feel called upon to offend her, and spoil his own pleasure by putting the idea into her head. So he took the goods the gods provided, sighing only to think how transitory they were likely to be.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY had been at sea a week, and expected to arrive in New York early the following morning. They were taking their last turn on the deck after dinner. Hugo Clarendon felt exceeding sorrowful; all the more so, perhaps, because Mrs. Delane was in her brightest, happiest mood.

‘I cannot realise,’ she said, ‘that I have been at sea a week. The time has positively flown. And now,’ and she looked in his eyes with the friendliest expression, ‘I can hardly, thanks to you, remember that I was ever at all miserable and terri-

fied—it seems as though all the time had been like a pleasant holiday. I wish I could thank you: I wish I could tell you what you have been to me.’

Hugo half smiled, half sighed.

‘And how,’ he said, ‘am I to tell you what you have been to me; what a God-send it has been to me, instead of sulking by myself or being bored to death by uncongenial people, to have the companionship of a kind, charming lady who has been saying pleasant things to me all the time. When you thank me I feel overwhelmed by the thought of how meagre and trifling my services have been. What have I done for you? The first day or two you accepted my arm for a few turns on the ship; I have had the privilege of occasionally putting a wrap round you, and trying to select you a superior potato at meals;

and, upon my word, my memory fails me for anything more.'

'You have taken care of me all the time,' cried Mrs. Delane, warmly. 'I have felt as if you belonged to me, and that I was quite safe. And did you not get me my treasure of a maid whom I could not possibly have got without you? The idea would never have occurred to me.'

Hugo laughed.

'Well!' he said, 'I will no longer try to depreciate myself, because it is altogether delightful to be thanked by you; but since the obligations are so very mutual, shall we not cry quits?'

'No,' said Ethel, 'I will not have any part of my debt cancelled. I shall not be happy until Arthur has thanked you, and until you have been to stay with us at the Manor House.'

The first part of her sentence gave him a disagreeable twinge, but the end atoned for it.

‘I think,’ remarked Clarendon, in the same half-jesting tone he had already used, ‘I shall make it my business henceforth to go about the world in search of distressed ladies. But I might not always be successful. Suppose now that when I ventured to offer you my wrap you had, like Aurora Raby, “Glanced at me with an air of calm surprise,” (I won’t swear that I am quoting quite correctly), and declined.’

‘In that case,’ returned Ethel, ‘you would have thought me a very ill-mannered woman, and would have left me to my fate.’

‘I should have felt horribly snubbed. You know, you might have thought it was

a subterfuge on my part, and that I was trying to make your acquaintance. And I am not sure,' smiling, 'that your suspicions would have been altogether unfounded.'

'All's well that ends well,' said Mrs. Delane, gaily.

'That ends well,' he repeated, rather dolefully. 'That is the worst of it—the end is drawing very near now.'

'By this time to-morrow,' said Ethel, 'I suppose we shall have parted.'

'No, indeed,' he protested. 'I shall not leave New York until I have delivered you up to your husband.'

'Oh!' cried Ethel, 'I cannot possibly consent to that. Your sister will be expecting you, and indeed you must not trouble about me any more after we land.'

'Would you think by my face,' asked

Hugo, 'that I was a very obstinate fellow?

She looked at him, smiling.

'Yes,' she answered; 'I can quite believe it. You are extremely amiable, and all amiable people are obstinate.'

'I am certainly obstinate,' he returned. 'And I intend to remain in New York until the Cunard boat comes in, whether you allow me the privilege of your society or not. Besides, you are a stranger in New York, and I know it well—will you not let me do showman to you for the next day or two?'

'There is nothing I should like better,' answered Mrs. Delane, 'if I shall really not be spoiling your plans or your sister's.'

'I am rather erratic,' said Hugo, 'and my sister is accustomed to expect me when she sees me. When Captain Delane comes out, you will of course see some-

thing of America now you are out here, and I hope you will come to Washington and make my sister's acquaintance. She will be more than delighted to welcome you. An Englishwoman is always a God-send to her.'

'I should like it of all things,' responded Ethel. 'Yes, of course, I must see the wonders of America. I am dying to see Niagara. Now I have got so far, I have no intention of going home without enlarging my knowledge and experience. Then, when I get back, I shall be able to swagger beautifully about my travels, just,' gaily, 'as if they had been quite voluntary. You will never, *never*,' anxiously, 'breathe the truth of our meeting to anyone, will you? You will let people think that my husband and I were together all the time?'

He replied, in rather a hurt voice,

‘I hope you can trust me just a little.’

‘Of course I can,’ she answered, quickly. ‘But you know one always feels safer for receiving an oath of secrecy about one’s dark doings.’

She looked at him with pleading eyes.

‘My position is a little humiliating, you must confess.’

‘I do not confess it,’ he answered, stoutly. ‘I think you have behaved like a heroine, and your husband ought to worship you for it. I daresay he will.’

The next morning they passed Sandy Hook at ten o’clock. A couple of hours later they stopped at the Quarantine station and remained there about an hour, and soon after three o’clock the ship was docked in New York harbour. Shortly after this the Purser came to look for Mrs.

Delane, bringing with him a gentleman who presented his card and told her that, according to instructions from Captain Delane, he had taken rooms for her at the Buckingham Hotel, and was at her service to do anything in his power to be of use to her. Seeing her, however, in company with, and apparently on the best of terms with a fine-looking young man, he did not press his offers of assistance as he would otherwise have done, but contented himself with assuring her that he was at her commands at any time when she should have need of him. He also handed her the following cable :

‘Words cannot express what I feel. Am following you by ——’ (mentioning Cunard boat) *‘and hope to be with you Saturday or Sunday at latest.’*

Ethel was radiant as she communicated

this to Hugo. She cordially thanked her husband's envoy, telling him that she would not fail to ask his assistance should she be in need of it, but that in the meantime her friend, Captain Clarendon, had been good enough to promise to look after her until her husband should arrive.

The stranger saluted her and departed, having conceived an idea of his own to the effect that the young lady had eloped with the good-looking Englishman, and that her husband was in pursuit, but not desirous of making a scandal.

Then Clarendon saw her luggage through the Customs, and accompanied her to the hotel. From motives of delicacy he took up his abode at the Windsor, near, instead of in the same hotel.

‘ You must rest a little and get settled,’ he told her, ‘ and then, if I may, I shall

come round about half-past seven, and take you to dine at Delmonico's.'

'That will be delightful,' she assented; and he went away, grudging even to leave her for a few hours. His happiness, he felt, was coming to an end; soon it would be altogether a thing of the past.

Now, in her own country, Ethel would not have dreamed of dining alone at a restaurant with a young man, but here, in this land of strangers, it seemed the most natural thing in the world; indeed, she felt as though Hugo belonged to her, and was her legitimate protector. She was extremely happy—her husband's cable had filled her heart with joy—he had, no doubt, been a prey to remorse at the thought of her hapless plight—he was hastening to join her: there would be a delightful renewing of love and confidence.

Meantime, she had her kind friend to take care of her and show her the sights; and, what had at first seemed an awful catastrophe, with no mitigating circumstances, now appeared in the light of an unmixed good.

Punctual to a moment, Clarendon came to fetch her, and before long they were seated at dinner in the famous restaurant. Mrs. Delane had made herself as smart as her limited wardrobe permitted, and was looking lovely—at least, so Hugo thought.

‘To-morrow,’ she said, gaily, ‘I am going shopping. I shall not put you to shame by letting you be seen with a dowdy Englishwoman. I have often heard what reputations we earn both in America and abroad by presenting ourselves at smart places in our ordinary travelling gear.’

Of course Clarendon protested that she looked charming, more charming than anyone in the room; but she laughed.

‘How dare you tell such a story even with the best intentions!’ she cried. ‘Look at all these lovely creatures and their lovely clothes, and wonderful hats and bonnets. Really American women are very pretty,’ and she looked admiringly round.

‘I always think,’ declared Hugo, ‘that there is no woman in the world who can touch an Englishwoman when she is pretty and well-bred.’

And he pointed his remark with a very expressive look.

‘I do not think,’ said Ethel, looking round, ‘that I ever saw so many pretty women in one room before—certainly not

in a restaurant. But what a noise! I can scarcely hear myself speak.'

'That is the bad paving,' he returned. 'It seems extraordinary that Americans, who are not often behindhand, can put up with the state of their streets as they do.'

Mrs. Delane and her companion came in for a good deal of attention. Clarendon especially was an object of much interest to the fair Americans, who evidently admired his physique. He, however, was entirely engrossed with Mrs. Delane. As we have heard, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder,' and she appeared to him by far the most attractive woman in the room. After dinner he took her back to her hotel, and stayed with her for half-an-hour, making arrangements for the following day.

'I must go shopping in the morning,'

she said, 'and I cannot expect you to accompany me on such an uninteresting expedition.'

But Clarendon declared that if there was one thing he loved better than another, it was shopping with a lady.

'Besides,' he said, 'you will want me to do *cicerone*.'

'And can you?' she asked.

'Oh, indeed, yes,' he laughed, 'you will find me extremely intelligent. I shall take you first to White and Howard's in Madison Avenue. They are the great *modistes*. By the way,' with some little confusion, 'you must have come away in such a hurry—may I—may I be your banker until Captain Delane arrives?'

But Ethel assured him gaily that she had heaps of money, though she was very grateful to him for making the suggestion.

So the next morning he called for her after breakfast, took her to Broadway, showed her Tiffany's and other shops of note, and waited patiently at White and Howard's whilst she selected appropriate apparel. They lunched at her hotel, after which he ordered a carriage and took her to see Brooklyn Bridge and through Brooklyn. They were to dine early at the Brunswick and go to Daly's Theatre afterwards.

'Upon my word,' he exclaimed, as he entered her sitting-room when he came to take her to dinner.

She knew what he meant, and laughed gaily.

'Fine feathers!' she said.

'The plumage is lovely,' he remarked, 'and almost worthy of the bird.'

Mrs. Delane knew that she was looking

well; knew too that he thought her charming, and a woman is always at her best in the society of a man who admires her and whom she likes. Ethel loved praise, it unconsciously put her on her mettle, and made her what the man who praised her believed her to be.

She scarcely ever remembered to have spent so delightful a day. Not only was she enjoying the present, but there was the heavenly anticipation of seeing Arthur, perhaps to-morrow.

As for Clarendon, he knew well enough that he was too happy, and that he would soon have to pay the penalty.

‘It is a very good thing,’ he said to himself, with a deep, deep sigh, ‘that I am not going to be with her much longer. And yet how hateful it will be when it is all over—how flat and stale everything

will seem. One thing I will certainly spare myself, I will not be witness of the bliss of the reunited lovers. As soon as I have placed her in his arms,' (with a groan), 'I will be off to Washington by the next train. She is the most charming, the most loveable woman I ever met, and just as good as she is charming. And I don't suppose he half appreciates her; that's just the way of things!'

Ethel woke radiant on the Saturday morning. She told herself that she had never felt so happy. Arthur's ship was due to-day, and, though Clarendon had cautioned her not to make too sure, she had a presentiment that they would be reunited this very day. She chatted gaily to Grant all the time she was dressing. The maid had willingly consented to remain with her until Captain Delane's

arrival, and even a little longer, and said cheerily that her brother had been waiting for her so long that a few days more or less would make no difference to either of them.

Ethel was to go shopping again in the morning with her escort, and for a drive in the afternoon. He had told her that the arrival of the boat at Sandy Hook would be notified at the hotel, so that they would have four or five hours notice. Nothing had been heard by luncheon time, so soon afterwards Clarendon ordered a carriage, and took her along the Riverside drive and home by Central Park. There were some very fine trotters in buggys and buck-boards, and she was delighted with these, having a great fondness for good horses.

‘I would give anything,’ she cried, ‘to

sit behind one of those dear things.'

'I am not sure,' replied Hugo, 'that you would like it so very much. Rushing through the air at that pace, and having your face stung with sharp little stones most of the time, added to a feeling of extreme insecurity, is not unmixed bliss. Goggles and a thick veil are indispensable.'

But she persisted that she would like to try it once, at all events.

Just so anxious as she was to hear news of the ship was Clarendon for it to be delayed, though, like the good fellow he was, he tried very hard to conquer his feelings.

But there was no news on their return, and Mrs. Delane agreed to dine with him at the Hoffman House.

'It will be so vexing,' she said, 'if the ship arrives in the night, and I cannot be there to meet him.'

‘He is not likely to land before morning,’ Hugo assured her. ‘Besides, he will probably not know where you are, unless he told his agent where to take rooms for you.’

She was very gay and charming all dinner time; her eyes sparkled, and she looked, as he thought, lovelier than ever with a glow of excitement on her cheeks.

I have written to Nelly,’ she told him, ‘and have given her the minutest details of my voyage. And I have scolded her for not telling me more about you after she met you at the Clinton’s.’

He laughed.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘that as she did not meet me as you did, under exceptional circumstances, I did not make much impression on her.’

‘When you come to stay with us,’ remarked Mrs. Delane, ‘Nelly shall come too. How interesting it will be to talk this time over. If a fortnight ago I could have been shown a picture of myself sitting at dinner in New York with an absolute stranger, who had in the meantime become my best friend, how astonished I should have been!’

‘Destiny is a strange thing!’ he answered. ‘I suppose this was all planned from the beginning of time. I wonder to what end?’

And he looked at her half doubtfully, half wistfully.

‘For my unmixed benefit,’ she said gaily.

He did not reply for a moment. He was thinking it was likely to be a very

mixed benefit for himself, but he had no intention of putting the thought into words.

‘Are you equal to early rising?’ she asked, presently. ‘For I am going to give orders that I may be called even in the smallest hours when the ship is telegraphed. If she is due at six, I mean to be at the dock.’

‘Make up your mind,’ he answered, ‘to have your sleep out. She will most likely not be in before mid-day.’

‘But if she should be,’ argued Ethel, ‘you will put the finishing touch to your kindness by coming to fetch me?’

‘I will indeed,’ he replied, making a further reflection on Captain Delane’s good fortune.

On his return to his hotel, he examined the time-table to see what trains went to

Washington. For as soon as he had restored the lost pair to each other, he would get out of sight, if not out of mind of them. He had no ambition to make a third; an unwelcome third.

CHAPTER X.

IN the morning Grant brought word that the Cunard boat had passed Sandy Hook, and would in all probability arrive in New York between eleven and twelve. A few minutes later a note came from Captain Clarendon, saying that he would call for Mrs. Delane at a quarter to eleven.

Ethel was radiant. She took the greatest pains with her toilette, and when Hugo came for her was rippling over with happy smiles and excitement.

‘Ah,’ she said to him as they went along, ‘I shall want such a big white

stone to mark this blessed day with. Now I am quite delighted that everything happened as it did. I will write Destiny with a big D, in grateful remembrance henceforward. I hope you will like Arthur—but I know you will. And he is sure to like you ; you have so many tastes in common. And then, too, he will be so grateful for all your goodness to me.'

Hugo smiled.

'It is very pleasant,' he said, 'to earn so much gratitude by doing the most delightful thing in the world. But please take pity on my modesty, and do not insist too much on my heroism.'

'Ah,' returned Ethel, with a little nod, 'it is all very well for you to make light of it, but you know that I could not have done without you.'

Arrived at the dock, they left the car-

riage, and walked up and down waiting for the ship to come in. They had not very long to wait, and great was Ethel's excitement when the boat came alongside. She scanned the decks eagerly with her eyes for the beloved face that she yearned to see, and was much disappointed not to recognise it amongst the passengers grouped about.

‘Why is he not there?’ she asked Hugo, in an excited tone. ‘Is it not very strange?’

‘No,’ answered Clarendon, ‘he probably does not dream of your being here, and is looking after his luggage.’

But Ethel was nervous and ill at ease.

‘I will go on board and look for him the moment they fix the gangway,’ said Hugo. ‘You wait here, and I will bring him off in triumph.’

He could not bear to see her look so anxious.

‘He *must* be there,’ she said, wistfully, and he returned,

‘Of course he must.’

Clarendon went on board, and found the Purser.

‘Is Captain Delane on board?’ he asked.

The Purser drew down the corners of his mouth, and looked very solemn.

‘Ah!’ he ejaculated, ‘that’s a bad business.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Hugo, hurriedly.

‘Why, four days ago, he was washed overboard; he and another passenger and a deck-hand. We shipped some heavy seas. He just came on deck to have a look round, and next moment a sea came

up from the stern and washed 'em all three clean off.'

'Great God!' cried Clarendon, white to the lips.

'Yes; it's a bad job. Are you related to him, sir?'

'No,' stammered Hugo, 'but his poor wife has come to meet him. She is on the Dock, and how am I going to tell her?'

The Purser shook his head.

'Dear! dear!' he exclaimed, 'that's a bad business. Can't you get her home before you tell her? Can't you say he didn't come in this ship? Very sorry, sir, but I can't stop now;' and Hugo was left standing with the most sickening sensation he had felt since the day of the tragedy of his life.

'God in Heaven!' he said to himself,

again and again. 'What can I say! What can I do!' He was terrified at the thought of the agony it was his cruel lot to inflict, and he had all an Englishman's horror of a scene in public.

Would she scream! would she faint! would she try to throw herself into the water! No! he must not tell her until they were safe in the hotel.

He went slowly back and joined her. Long before he reached her he could see how her eager eyes were devouring his face.

'Oh, God, have mercy upon her!' he said, from the very bottom of his heart. 'Poor little girl! Poor little girl!'

'Well!' she cried, running to meet him. 'Where is he? Where is he?'

'It is very strange,' answered Clarendon, slowly, 'but he is not on board.'

‘Not on board!’ she gasped. ‘But he must be; he must. There is some mistake. It is not possible that he is not there. If he had not come by her he would have cabled.’

‘I have seen the Purser,’ replied Hugo, ‘and he says there is no one of that name on board.’

‘Oh, but I must see him,’ cried Ethel. ‘I must indeed. You cannot have made him understand. Pray take me to him.’

‘It is useless,’ he returned, gently. ‘I have made every inquiry. He can tell you nothing that he has not told me.’

‘And do you mean to say,’ cried Ethel, looking at him with wide-open eyes, ‘that Arthur never went on board at all?’

Clarendon hated telling a lie, but in this case there was absolutely no alternative.

‘Yes,’ he answered, unflinchingly. ‘Now

let me take you back to the hotel.'

Without another word she walked beside him to the carriage. Could this pale, dejected woman be the bright, pretty, laughing creature he had helped out of it half-an-hour earlier!

Mrs. Delane remained quite silent. All sorts of dreadful thoughts were sweeping through her brain. It did not occur to her that anything had happened to her husband: the idea which assailed her was that he wanted to punish her for her wayward freak, and that he was wilfully keeping her in suspense. A great bitterness against him came into her heart, and she summoned all her pride to the rescue of her misery.

She did not utter a word during the drive, but sat staring out of one window whilst Hugo gazed out of the other, rack-

ing his brain to think how he could break this awful tragedy to her.

He helped her out at the hotel, and followed her up to her sitting-room. She went and looked out of the window in silence for a moment, and then turned and came towards him.

‘Do you mind,’ she said, gently. ‘Will you think me rude and ungracious if I tell you that I want to be alone? I feel stupefied—I want to think.’

He went towards her, a great light of pity shining in his kind eyes, and he took both her hands in his. Then, before he had time to speak, she knew and understood.

‘Oh!’ she gasped, trembling in every limb, ‘he is dead! Something has happened to him!’

He was like one dumb, but his eyes were eloquent enough.

‘Speak!’ she cried, ‘for pity’s sake—tell me!’

‘Oh!’ he groaned, ‘how can I tell you. How can I break your heart!’

‘Oh,’ she said, in a smothered voice, ‘then it is so!’

She threw herself into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

He came up close beside her, and spoke in a low, hoarse voice.

‘He was drowned at sea—washed overboard in a gale four days ago.’

She uncovered her face and stared at him with stricken eyes.

‘And I have been going about laughing and happy and enjoying myself. How horrible!’

He could think of nothing to say, so he stretched out his hand and took hers.

‘I know how you feel,’ he murmured, in the lowest, tenderest voice. ‘I, too, lost in one sudden awful moment what was dearest in the world to me.’

He could not have chosen his words better had they been studied, instead of being born of a great impulse of pity.

‘Ah!’ she groaned. ‘You know! How does one live through these things?’

Clarendon was not a religious man; he was afraid even to think now-a-days what he believed and what he doubted, but at this moment he felt the great need of a divine source from which to extract comfort for this stricken soul. But he had a horror of the platitudes of those Job’s comforters who can see the wisdom and

the mercy of dispensations that are inflicted on their neighbours.

So, looking at her with most sorrowful eyes, he said,

‘I do not know. God help you, poor child!’

She did not shed a single tear—he wished she would—but sat staring with a stony expression as though she were gazing at the Medusa head. Her voice, too, sounded strange and far-off.

‘And an hour ago,’ she uttered, ‘I thought I was the happiest woman in the world. We parted in anger, you know. I would not say good-bye to him; and for these ten days past I have been thinking over all the kind and loving words I would say to him when he came. And oh, my God! I shall never say them now!’

And she broke into a great tearless sob that wrung his heart.

He kept her hand in his, stroking it tenderly.

‘I have brought it all on myself,’ she went on, presently, finding some comfort in bitter self-accusation. ‘If I had not opposed him, he would have come out by our ship, and had fine weather all the time, and nothing would have happened to him.’

‘No, no,’ cried Hugo. ‘You must not, you shall not, blame yourself. You did what every loving woman would have done. You cannot be stronger than destiny ; you did what your nature and your heart compelled you to. He recognised that. Did not his cable show it? Did he not say, “Words cannot express what I feel”? That showed how conscious he was of your

love, and his remorse at what you had suffered for his sake. And, poor chap! he too, you may be sure, was building on that meeting, and counting the hours until he should be with you.'

At his words, the floodgates of her tears were unloosed, and she cried and cried as though her heart were melting away.

He watched with little short of agony the throes that convulsed her slight frame—he was rent and torn by pity; his chest heaved with great sighs, and he would have given anything in the world to take her in his sheltering arms and soothe her as if she had been a little child.

'What shall I do! what shall I do!' she gasped, now and again, and he could think of nothing else to say but, 'Poor child! Poor little girl!' But the words

came from the very bottom of his heart.

Nothing could avail to help her in her agony, and to know that was cruel suffering to him, and yet the desire to soothe and comfort grew stronger every moment in him, and he was turning over in his brain all manner of plans for her immediate future. He was not one of those men who are influenced by a burning desire to get away from the sight of pain and suffering. For a moment he thought of telegraphing to his sister at Washington, and begging her to come at once. A woman, he thought, can do so much more for one of her own sex in trouble. But he dismissed the thought, for his sister was a worldly fashionable woman, and he was not sure that the two would be congenial to each other at such a crisis, whatever they might have been in the

ordinary relations of life. He built more hopes on that nice, sympathetic maid.

Presently Ethel raised her poor, half blinded eyes to his face.

‘You are very good and kind,’ she said, ‘but now I think I must be alone.’

‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘yes, I will go. May I send your maid?’

‘No, not yet,’ she answered.

‘When you want me,’ he uttered, in a low voice, ‘I will be with you at any moment. I shall leave word downstairs where I am to be found.’

‘Thank you,’ she answered, mechanically. Then, as he was going, she cried after him with a great sob in her voice, ‘Do not think I am ungrateful, but now—now!’ She flung herself back in her chair in a fresh agony of tears.

‘I know, I know,’ he cried, in a choked voice, hurrying out.

He sent for Grant, and in a few words told her what had happened.

‘You won’t leave Mrs. Delane now,’ he said. ‘Promise me that you will go back to England with her. I will undertake that you shall not lose by your kindness if you do.’

The girl answered, with tears in her eyes,

‘Poor lady! I will do anything for her. And I don’t want anything for doing it. Why, I would not leave her like this if it was ever so.’

Clarendon was so grateful that he shook her warmly by the hand.

‘God bless you,’ he said. ‘When Mrs. Delane is able to think about her journey home or anything else, and wants to see

me, send a messenger round to the Windsor at once. I shall remain within call.'

And he walked away the saddest man in New York that day. The idea did not cross his brain that good might come to him out of this catastrophe; he only remembered that the woman for whom he had so tender a regard was broken-hearted. He asked of himself with weary iteration the question that he had asked in the past, when he lay crushed and writhing under the wheels of the Juggernaut Despair, how it could please or amuse Providence to witness the agony of the being it has created; and, as before, he found no answer. It is a great consolation to those who can believe it, that these tortures are sent in mercy, but this submissive frame of mind is only given to

the few. The majority of sufferers rebel against a cruelty in which they can see neither mercy nor justice.

If this racking of nerve and heart always resulted in the moral benefit to the victim which some people assert, it would doubtless be an argument in its favour, but does it? Are there not grown-up children whom scourgings and punishments harden and embitter—are there not natures whom love and happiness would develop, as sunshine and soft, gracious rains develop spring blossoms, whilst bitter winds and hail-storms would kill them unopened, immature! Sometimes, when after a lapse of years we are brought to say, ‘Perhaps it was for the best,’ it is generally because the wound is cicatrised and we have adapted ourselves to circumstances.

Hugo went back to his hotel and wrote letters; one in particular to his sister, in which he told her what had happened.

‘I do hope, my dear,’ he finished up, ‘that I am not putting out your plans very much, but I cannot, in common humanity, leave this poor, afflicted soul, separated as she is from every creature who belongs to her. It is the most awful position I have ever known a woman to be placed in. I should not wonder if it kills her. Just at present my movements must be regulated by her needs, and I will let you know at once when anything is settled. I expect she will want to return to England immediately, and I must arrange everything for her as soon as she can bear to think of or discuss plans. But be sure that I shall be with you as soon as possible, and then I will devote myself to

you, body and soul, for as long as it may please you.'

He did not stir out of the hotel in case a summons should come for him, and at nine o'clock it came in a line from Grant.

'I think, sir, if you would come, Mrs. Delane would like to see you. She is a little calmer.'

And Clarendon did not lose one moment in obeying the summons. After he left Grant she had waited a couple of hours before entering Mrs. Delane's room, and had taken care that no one else should intrude upon her. At the end of that time she went in, carrying with her a basin of soup. She did not for a moment think Mrs. Delane would drink it, for she remembered well the day when the news came of her own mother's death : how she had cried all day without ceasing, and

refused food or comfort, and been impatient with those who pressed her to eat. She did not mean to worry her, poor lady—she would just leave it there.

She knocked gently twice, and, as there was no answer, went in. Mrs. Delane was sitting on the floor; her arms on the sofa and her face buried in them. Grant put the tray down softly, and then went and stood beside her, with the tears running down her cheeks.

‘Oh, my poor, poor lady!’ she said; and there was so true a ring in her voice that Ethel raised her poor, half-blinded eyes to the girl’s face.

She stretched out a hand dumbly to her, and Grant helped her to rise and sit on the sofa.

‘Oh,’ she cried, piteously, ‘what *shall* I do!’

Tears rained down the girl's face, and she said, in a choked voice,

‘Oh, if I could only say something to comfort you!’

And once-proud Ethel, so forlorn and lonely and helpless, drew the girl down to the sofa, and leaning her head against her shoulder, wept afresh. They were not mistress and maid now, they were only two women, one sorrowing, one pitying.

CHAPTER XI.

ALL through the long day Giant Despair stood over Ethel, dealing blow upon blow on her crushed heart. He brought before her the tender memories of love crying in her ear, 'These are gone for ever. Never again will you know glad, sweet hours,'—he pictured them tenfold happier than they had actually been. She forgot that Arthur had ever been cold or unkind and hard to please, he was the ideal lover whom reality could never now make less dear or desirable. She had counted on

the joy of this meeting, and now it was never to be. She magnified the bliss that might have been, until the loss of it was an agony too grievous to be borne. How could she live through it—how face the days and months and years without him! For when a woman, however young, loses the man she loves, it ever seems to her as the end of all things: of youth, of hope, of joy. For the first few hours her loss occupied her thoughts to the exclusion of all others; then came the desire to know all the dreadful details; the wish to have all that had belonged to him. She wanted to be with Nelly, to hear all that he had said and thought about her when he discovered her flight to America.

She must get back to England. Then, for the first time, she remembered Clarendon. It seemed quite natural to expect

that he would do everything for her. She asked Grant if he were to be found, and the girl sent off the message. Clarendon came at once. He entered the room very softly, and approached the sofa where she still sat. He was shocked to see the ravages that grief had made in her face ; the beautiful, lustrous eyes that he had admired so much were dim and almost closed with weeping ; her cheeks were ivory pale. Even as she stretched her hand out to him she broke into fresh tears, her nerves were so unstrung. Hugo did not speak, but held her hand and waited until she should regain her self-possession.

‘I did not mean,’ she sobbed, ‘to treat you to this ; but, oh, I think my heart is broken !’

A dreadful knot rose in his throat and threatened to choke him ; her pain, his

powerlessness to help her filled him with a sense of impotent misery. Oh! he thought, if I were a woman instead of a fool of a man, I should know what to say and do—perhaps I might comfort her. What *can* I say?

He hated himself for sitting there dumb, and yet he could not find a word to say.

At last he burst out in despair,

‘If you had only Mrs. Tower with you, or some one whom you care for.’

‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘that is what I want to see you about. Get me home! only get me home! I can bear it better there.’

‘I will,’ he assented, eagerly. ‘The *Germanic* sails on Wednesday. To-morrow morning, if you will let me, I will make every arrangement for you.’

‘Thank you,’ she said; ‘it will be very

kind of you. And Grant has been so good—she has offered to go back with me. I do not know what I should do without her. Now,’ trying to command herself, ‘I want you to—to tell me—all you know.’

He repeated to her just what the Purser had told him.

‘But,’ he added, ‘he had not time to say very much then, but I will hear all that I can to-morrow. And you would of course wish to have all his things. I did not like to take any steps until I had spoken to you, and perhaps they would not give them up to me. I was thinking the best way would be to let the agent whom he employed ask for them on your behalf.’

‘Whatever you think best,’ she said, wearily.

‘I am so afraid,’ said Hugo, ‘that you will have such a bad night. Everything seems blacker and more dreadful then. Will you not let me fetch a doctor? He might give you something to make you sleep and forget for a few hours.’

‘I do not want to forget,’ she answered, sorrowfully.

‘Ah,’ he returned, ‘but you will be ill.’

‘I wish I could die!’ she uttered, despairingly.

‘I know,’ he murmured, soothingly, pressing her hand. ‘That is how one feels at first. There was a time when I felt that I could absolutely not go on bearing the pain of living and remembering. You would hate me if I told you that the pain would ever go—I will not tell you so. Once I thought that if I

were ever to smile again I should be the greatest brute on earth.'

'Why are we tortured like this?' she asked, looking at him in helpless misery.

'Ah!' he echoed, 'why? I have asked myself that often enough, but I have never found the answer yet. I wish,' speaking reverently, 'that I could see the loving hand that some good people recognise in these awful judgments, but,' bowing his head, 'I *cannot*.'

'No,' she answered. 'It is not natural to torture what you love, and to torture it through its best affections. The worst man would not do that, and how can we believe it of God?'

He was silent. He would have liked that she, being a woman, should be on the side of vindicating the love of God, but he could not blame her for thinking as he

thought himself. With most men who are good fellows, I think the ideal woman is religious, meek, trusting, resigned. She is a complex creature, that ideal woman. She is not expected to be too reasonable, she is pardoned for being a little illogical, a little unpunctual, a little hard on her own sex, but she must be very unselfish, she must adore all children, and she must not question too closely the authority of God or of man made in His image.

There followed a silence of some moments. Hugo broke it.

‘Would you not like me to cable to your friends?’ he asked, and Ethel replied affirmatively, giving the addresses of Mrs. Tower, her aunt, and the lawyer. ‘I thought,’ he said, ‘that if you approved, I would cable in my own name to Mrs. Tower, telling her that we came out to-

gether, and that I will be of what use I can. It might relieve her mind a little to know that you are not quite alone. And shall I not ask her to meet you at Liverpool?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘please do. And I think she had better break the news to my aunt. The whole affair will be such a terrible shock to her.’

‘And,’ pursued Clarendon, ‘I should suggest that the agent here should communicate with your lawyer.’

She assented.

‘Now,’ he said, rising reluctantly, for he could not bear to leave her alone with her grief, ‘perhaps I had better go. And to-morrow, when I have taken your passage and sent the cables, shall I come to you, or only send you word?’

‘Please come,’ she said ; then piteously,

‘You seem just now to be the only friend I have in the world.’

‘I wish,’ he rejoined, sadly, ‘that I could better show my friendship.’

‘How could you?’ she answered. ‘What could anyone do more? No one,’ with a sob, ‘can bring him back to me.’

‘I hope,’ he said, ‘we may get a cable in America to-morrow; but, as you know, there is five hours difference between English time and this, and if Mrs. Tower should be away from home, we may not hear until Tuesday.’

As he walked back to his hotel, he felt a keen desire to know more about her affairs. Would her husband’s death make a great difference to her financially? She had no children. Perhaps the estate was entailed. He concluded that there was an estate, and that the husband had been


well off, and that they had lived in good style. Perhaps she was not only losing the man of her heart, but many of the pleasant things of life besides. He would not have put a leading question to her for the world, but it would have been an immense relief to him to know that Captain Delane's death would not materially change her mode of life. He did not like to offer again to be her banker, but it would be dreadful to him to think she had not everything she wanted. Anyhow, he would take her passage and pay for it, and he supposed her lawyer would cable out what money she was likely to require.

Then he composed his message to Mrs. Tower.

' Came out on the ——— with Mrs. Delane.

The —— (mentioning Cunard boat) brought terrible news. Captain Delane washed over-board in gale. Wife heart-broken. Doing all I can. She sails Germanic, Wednesday. Has got nice maid. Will you meet her Liverpool. You may remember me at Clinton's. —Hugo Clarendon.'

He sat up thinking long into the night, and when he went to bed, his slumbers were far from being of their usual sound and peaceful nature. He had a very tender heart ; it was grievous to him that anyone should suffer—much more anyone to whom he felt as he felt to Mrs. Delane. Every time he woke, he thought of her lying in tears and agony, without a gleam of hope or light in the future. She would get over it in time, he knew, as we all of us get over the griefs which we believe,



when they assail us, to be unquenchable, unconquerable beyond all remedy, but how much she had to suffer first. He remembered the agony of his nights: the greater agony of his wakings for months after the tragedy in his own life.

And now he was almost ashamed to think that he no longer even regretted his dead love; that she was nothing but a gentle memory. Ah, well! thank God one did forget, or what a world of mourners this would be. How few there are who live to even three decades without at least one deep scar from Death's sword in his heart! But when our arms are round our beloved, our lips to hers or his, with what scorn we should repudiate the idea that a day could ever come when we should have forgotten him or be content with a life from which he had gone for evermore!

The first thing on Monday morning he sent off the cables. After breakfast he went in search of the lawyer's agent, and then to the White Star office to take Mrs. Delane's passage. This done he sought out and found the Captain of the ship by which Captain Delane had sailed from England. He was full of consideration and sympathy, but there was nothing to add to the Purser's story. It had been the work of a moment; a tremendous sea had come up from the stern, and had washed the three men off. Captain Delane's things should be sent at once to the Buckingham Hotel. In reply to a question of Clarendon's, he said that, if Mrs. Delane wished to see him, he would certainly go to her, but that he had not exchanged a dozen words with her husband,

and feared the interview would afford her no satisfaction.

After this, Clarendon went to give an account to Mrs. Delane of all that he had done. He found her alone, looking very white and ill. Grant, she told him, had gone to get her some mourning. He tried to persuade her to drive out in the afternoon with her maid, and get some air, as it seemed to him that the very worst thing for her was the confinement in the heated rooms, which are the rule of all American hotels.

She shook her head.

‘No,’ she said, ‘I shall not go out of the hotel until I leave it on Wednesday for ever.’

He did not try to persuade her any more, and soon after went away.

In the course of the afternoon he received a cable from Mrs. Tower :

' Thankful you are with her. Much distressed. Will be at Liverpool.'

Clarendon put the message in an envelope, and sent it round to Mrs. Delane. She also had heard from her friend :

' Terribly grieved. Deepest sympathy.'

Ethel was a little comforted to think that Nelly knew of her dreadful situation. The whole afternoon was devoted by her to looking over her husband's luggage. She had a wild hope that she might find something in his handwriting relating to her, but there were only a couple of business letters begun, which he had evidently intended to finish and post on his arrival. She kissed the pen he had handled, fondled the trinkets he had worn,

and laid her head against the breast of his coat, as she had laid it when he had been alive and his heart had beat beneath it. And she cried and cried for the love that could never come back, and the joy of life that was over. All her existence had been comparatively smooth and happy, and now in one little fortnight she had suffered such anguish and torment as many women never know or guess at all their lives through. She thought, as the young always think, that in all the years to come she would never be happy, nor know any pleasure again. She was so young, only twenty-two, and the end had come. Towards evening her thoughts turned to Clarendon, and she said to herself,

‘How selfish I have been in my grief! I am keeping him all this time from his sister and his amusements, and he is too

kind to show me that I am putting him to inconvenience.'

She bade Grant send a message to his hotel asking him to come round after dinner if he were disengaged.

When he entered the room, he was shocked to see that she looked even whiter and more ill than in the morning, and he was smitten with apprehension lest she should die of grief or be too ill to be removed from the hotel. When she had greeted him, she broke at once into her subject.

'I have been thinking,' she said, 'how very selfish I have been about you. All this time I am keeping you from your sister, and putting out all your plans, and you have been so good and kind that you have allowed me to forget it. But now—

now that you have done everything for me, you must please think of yourself. I want to say good-bye to you to-night, and you must start for Washington to-morrow morning.'

'I shall not leave New York,' he answered, firmly, 'until the *Germanic* has sailed. If you will allow me, I shall take you on board and see you off, but, in any case, I shall not leave until Wednesday.'

Ethel was intensely relieved by his words. She had felt it her duty to say what she had said, but by this time she had grown to rely upon him so entirely that a load was removed from her heart by the knowledge that he would be with her to the end of her stay in the city.

'I shall never be able to thank you,' she said, once more falling to weeping, for she

was so weak and unstrung that she had no self-command left.

How surprised Clarendon would have been to hear that the besetting sins of this woman were pride and self-will; that she was inclined to be a tyrant and an autocrat—he had never seen her anything but a gentle, yielding, dependent woman, looking to him for everything. It was a side of her nature that her husband had never seen, and that few but herself knew the existence of.

‘I wish,’ Clarendon answered, fervently, ‘that I could do ten times more for you. I feel so powerless. The greatest happiness you can give me is to let me settle and arrange everything for you as long as we are together.’

Ethel looked up at him.

‘You must have a very kind heart,’ she

said. 'Most men are bored by the sight of a woman in trouble, and want to get away from her.'

'Why,' he cried, 'where have you picked up such an idea about us?' Then he stopped, thinking his words might imply a reproach to the memory of her husband. 'I daresay,' he added, 'you think so because you are so unselfish that you cannot bear the thought of giving the least trouble.'

'I am afraid,' she answered, a little sadly, 'that is not one of my virtues. I have been rather used to being spoiled and to having my own way too much.'

'You may have had your own way,' he replied, with conviction, 'but I am quite sure that it has not spoiled you.' Then, feeling it was not a time for compliments, however sincere, he went on, 'To-morrow

I will go to the agent, who is pretty sure to have heard from your lawyer, and bring you word if I may.'

Then he left her, and went away more distressed than ever on her account. It was terrible to him to think of all the suffering that lay before her, and of the long, lonely voyage with no hope at the end of it.

CHAPTER XII.

THE agent had received a cable from Mr. Bryant giving him minute instructions, and a second one for Mrs. Delane, full of kindness and sympathy.

‘Of course,’ the agent said to Clarendon, ‘I should be delighted to do anything in my power for Mrs. Delane, but she would no doubt prefer the assistance of a friend like yourself.’

He still maintained a rooted idea that Hugo was the lady’s lover, and it occurred

to him that perhaps they did not look upon the accident to the husband with altogether unmixed grief. He would not have been surprised to hear that Captain Delane had come to his death by premeditation.

Hugo thanked him cordially, and replied that he had already taken Mrs. Delane's passage home, and intended to look after her until she sailed. He then went to her hotel, taking Mr. Bryant's cable, and told Ethel of the arrangements which he had made for her departure. Once more he tried to induce her to go out and get some fresh air, but she would not be persuaded.

The next morning he brought a carriage and took her to the dock.

'Will they let you come on board,' she

asked, 'or must I say good-bye to you here?'

'Oh,' he replied, 'there will be no difficulty about my going on board.'

He took her to her state-room, but, as the morning was bright and not cold, she said she should go on deck until the ship sailed, that she might see the last of him.

The air revived her, and he was thankful to see a faint tinge of colour creep into her white cheeks.

'You do not like me to thank you,' she said, presently, 'and I could never tell you all that is in my heart. But some day we shall meet again, shall we not? May I write to you?'

'May you?' he echoed. 'You could not give me greater pleasure.'

‘And some day,’ she said, ‘you will come and see me, will you not? Now you seem to me the greatest friend I have in the world, and I cannot bear to think we shall never meet again.’

‘I have a presentiment,’ he answered, and something like a smile curved his lips, ‘that we shall not see each other to-day for the last time.’

The minutes sped on; there were signs of bustle and preparation on the ship, and presently Ethel said,

‘Ought you not to be going? You must not share the fate of the Cork merchant of whom you told me.’

‘No,’ he answered, ‘I will go and see how long there is before you sail.’

He left her and disappeared. Twenty minutes passed; he had not returned.

She was sitting in her deck-chair, expecting him back every minute, when suddenly there was a movement of the ship.

‘Oh!’ she said to herself, with a sensation of pain. ‘And I shall not be able to say good-bye to him!’

She ran to the side of the ship, thinking to wave a farewell to him on the dock, but he was nowhere to be seen. A feeling of intense disappointment came over her. Not to have said good-bye; not to have seen the last of him! she felt almost hurt, although she knew there could be no neglect on his part; that his not having returned to her must be owing to some accidental circumstance. She turned to go back to her chair, and there, three paces in front of her, stood Hugo.

‘What!’ she cried. ‘You are still here?’

‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘I always meant to go back to England with you, but I did not tell you sooner, because I felt sure you would oppose my wish.’

She put out her hand to him.

‘I do not think,’ she said, impulsively, ‘that there was ever anyone like you.’ And two great tears rolled down her cheeks.

Grant made her own reflections.

‘Well!’ she said to herself, ‘if Captain Delane was anything like this one, I don’t wonder at her fretting so, poor lady. But there! I don’t suppose he was. There’s not many of that sort, gentle or simple, as far as I know. Still a man will do a good deal to get you sometimes. Afterwards it’s different.’

For the first twenty-four hours the pas-

sage was smooth and fair, but then a gale sprang up, and for two days and nights Ethel never left her berth. She suffered all the horrors that she had undergone during the first part of her passage out, but Grant was an inestimable blessing to her. The girl was not ill, and she was so kind and sympathetic that Ethel felt hers was the service of love, not that of a hireling.

Several times in the day Clarendon came to the door for news, and brought grapes and anything he could think of for Mrs. Delane's comfort, and Grant would meet him on the deck and give him news of the sufferer. She was perfectly aware that he was deeply in love with Mrs. Delane, and sympathised heartily with him.

At last the storm abated, and to Clarendon's joy, he was allowed to take Ethel on deck. What with her sufferings, mental and physical, she looked a shadow of her former self, but to a man like Clarendon, a pale, fragile woman is always more attractive than a robust one. If he had been careful and tender over her on the way out, he was ten times more assiduous now that his heart was overflowing with pity for her forlorn condition.

It seemed almost a passion with her to idealise her dead husband; to exalt him into a hero; to invest him with a thousand qualities which he had certainly not possessed. But that is the way of a woman. Perhaps the subject was not a very attractive one to Hugo, but he listened with the tenderest patience, and

an appearance of sincere interest, thinking, in a half melancholy mood the while, what a capacity for love this dear woman had, and how blest must have been the man who called it forth. And Ethel having talked so much of her own loss, and feeling a little guilty at having selfishly dwelt so much upon it, would try to draw Hugo out about his own sad experience, thinking he too would like to ease his mind by the recital of his past grief. But the subject was unwelcome to him; the dead had buried their dead, and were sleeping in their green graves, with flowers blooming and trees waving above them, and as he sat beside the woman whom he had begun to love, he had little desire to revive the memory of the one whom he had almost forgotten.

But, since it was his one great wish to distract her thoughts from her pain, he did violence to his own feelings and showed no unwillingness to talk of or to listen to any theme it might please her to choose. The days went by; already they were nearing Queenstown. Ethel desired to have a wire sent to Mrs. Tower, asking her not to bring Davis, her maid, to Liverpool. She had become so much attached to Grant that she wished to be waited upon by her as long as possible.

They expected to arrive in England on the Thursday, and on the following Saturday Grant was to go back to New York by another Cunard boat, in which Hugo also was to be a passenger. Mrs. Delane proposed to remain a night in Liverpool.

‘I cannot tell you,’ she said to Clarendon, ‘how I dread the thought of going

home. Everything will remind me, and oh, the terrible loneliness of it!

‘Yes,’ he answered, soothingly, ‘I am sure it will be so. But why not stay with your aunt in London for a time, and put off returning to the Manor House?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, ‘I think I shall do that.’ Presently she said: ‘How I shall miss you! I do not know any other man in the world who would have done for me what you have done. Will you,’ very earnestly, ‘remember when you have left me—if you think of me, as I hope you will sometimes—that I shall never, *never* to my dying day forget all your goodness and kindness?’

‘You hurt me,’ he replied, gently, ‘when you insist so upon what I have done; and you do not consider that it has been a happiness to me to be able to make

things a little smother for you. And, when I return from America, you will let me see you, will you not?’

‘Indeed,’ she answered, warmly, ‘you will always be as welcome in my house as the best friend I have.’

Hugo became very melancholy at the thought of parting from Mrs. Delane. For three weeks now he had been constantly in her society: she had completely filled his thoughts, and, though there had been a good deal of pain mixed with the pleasure, it still seemed to him as if happiness had weighed the heavier in the scales. His occupation, like Othello’s, would be gone.

Mrs. Tower came to meet them on the tender; and, from this moment, Hugo studiously effaced himself, and gave all his attention to assisting Grant.

‘You and I,’ he said to her, with his pleasant smile, ‘will soon be taking a voyage again together ;’ and she gave him one of her bright looks and answers.

From motives of delicacy, Hugo started for London at once, leaving the two friends to each other.

Nelly found time to express herself very prettily to him.

‘What a friend you have been!’ she said. ‘I cannot tell you what a comfort it has been to me to know that our poor dear was not alone at this awful time, but had you to take care of her. I wish you were staying here the night. I want so much to hear from you all that happened, but you have sacrificed yourself too much already.’

Clarendon would gladly have stayed, but he felt instinctively that, for many

reasons, it would be better to go, and so he excused himself. But his heart was very sad as he bade farewell to Mrs. Delane, and, as he sped up to London in the express, he felt as though all the salt and savour had gone out of life.

With Ethel there was at first the excitement of telling her woeful story, and of hearing from her friend all that Arthur had felt and said when he became aware of her flight to America. And then there was not only the recounting of her dreadful experiences, but there was a certain amount of pleasure in dilating upon Captain Clarendon's goodness to her; and Mrs. Tower, who had a considerable knowledge of men and their motives, drew her own conclusions from that gentleman's extraordinary self-sacrifice. I am afraid she

had not a very exalted idea of men's unselfishness, and was wont to believe that they did not act in this heroic manner for nothing. But she forbore to make any suggestion of this kind to her friend.

The next day Ethel felt a strange void : the excitement of seeing and confiding in Nelly was over, and a great sense of loneliness overtook her. But she ascribed it entirely to her grief for the loss of her husband, and would not have admitted to herself that it was the thousand little cares of Hugo, such as Arthur had never shown her, which she felt the lack of so keenly. He was still the best, the kindest friend she had in the world, but it would have seemed a sort of sacrilege to miss or to feel the loss of any man but her husband.

She was full of regret at parting with Grant, who had been such a comfort to her, and gave her so magnificent a present that the girl refused at first to accept it. She had another very handsome token of regard from Clarendon which he presented on their outward journey.

Ethel's meeting with her aunt was a painful one. Nelly had considered it absolutely necessary to tell the whole truth to Mrs. Onslow, as any other course would have put Ethel in a false and painful position and have compelled her to tell many untruths, which would have been abhorrent to her straightforward nature. Indeed, Nelly was certain that upon her return Ethel would confess the truth to her aunt, in which case she, Nelly, would appear to Aunt Mary in the

shape of an arch deceiver. Mrs. Onslow had never really liked Captain Delane, and she was perfectly devoted to Ethel, so that when the latter enlarged upon her lost husband's virtues, the utmost that her dissentient aunt could do was to preserve silence. This wounded Ethel, who wanted everyone else to fall down and worship before the memory of her idol, and after a few days she longed to get home to the Manor House. Mrs. Tower had promised to spend a fortnight with her there on her return, and was as good as her word. It was a terribly sad home-going. Everything reminded her of her loss, and a wave of desolation swept over her heart. She had always loved her home so dearly; had always returned to it with joy after even a short absence: every happy memory of

her life was connected with it. Here her beloved had wooed her: here they had spent the happy days of their early marriage before the estrangement which she could not bear to think of now. She was experiencing the 'sorrow's crown of sorrow' which always makes itself so cruelly felt by women of imaginative and romantic temperaments. Remembrance is so much to them, anticipation so great that the reality is always more or less disappointing. But then what infinite joy is sometimes theirs in living over and over again some happiness that was but of the most transient nature. Life would be intolerable if there were not so much compensation in it.

Mrs. Tower was devoted to Ethel, and she was an exceedingly sympathetic and

tender-hearted woman, but even she found it a little trying to listen to; and to be called upon to join in the eternal laudation of a man whom under no circumstances could she have brought herself to look upon in the light of a hero. She had never cared very much for him, and she had been to the last degree indignant with him for his recent behaviour to his wife. That he could have deliberately inflicted such pain and humiliation upon a woman who had treated him so generously, just for the sake of his own poor, petty, morbid vanity, was an unpardonable sin in her eyes. In her heart she did not consider his death an irreparable loss, for she did not believe that, with their antagonistic natures, Ethel's exacting love, his grudging to give it as though it were a sign of

weakness and dependence, that they could ever have been really happy. On the other hand, when it pleased her friend to vary her theme by recounting the kindness and consideration which Clarendon had shown her, Nelly listened with the heartiest and most sympathetic interest.

‘Now,’ she said to herself, ‘when poor Ethel can bring herself to rise from grovelling at the feet of that clay image of hers, and is brought into contact with the other, who must really be a good fellow, it is to be hoped she will make the discovery that everything has happened for the best, and may marry him, and be fifty times happier than she could have been with Arthur Delane. He *must* be in love with her—however good a fellow a man may be, he does not put himself quite

so much out of the way for a woman in whom he only takes a friendly interest. And he, fortunately, is well off, so there would be no cause for heart-burnings on the question of money.'

Mrs. Tower was, however, far too clever and had too much good taste to appear to see anything suspicious or unusual in Captain Clarendon's kindness. She contented herself with saying that it had been extremely good of him to bring Ethel back to England, and showed what an excellent heart he must have. She had always heard him well spoken of—he was very popular with both men and women, and she wondered that, being so desirable all round, he had not been snapped up long ago. Yes, she remembered hearing of that sad affair about the poor girl

being killed, but that was years ago, and no one could go on wearing the willow for ever.

Ethel looked reproachfully at her friend.

‘Do you think,’ she said, in a voice that was almost tragic, ‘do you think that a time will ever come when I shall leave off grieving for Arthur?’

Nelly, who was sitting on the sofa beside her, took Ethel’s hand and caressed it gently.

‘My dear,’ she answered, ‘it would be unnatural for you just now to be able to contemplate even the bare possibility of such a thing, but mercifully Time heals wounds and fills up gaps in a way we do not dream of in the first shock of our grief, and I hope and believe that, even though you may never forget your husband, the

time may come when he will be only a gentle memory in your heart.'

Mrs. Delane turned from her friend with some coldness.

'If I thought so,' she answered, 'I should consider myself the most heartless woman in the world.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE author uses his privilege of taking the scythe from the hand of Time, and mowing down the weeks and months with one long, swift sweep. So, between this chapter and the last, fifteen moons have waxed and waned. Long weeks of pain and grief to some, swift months of pleasure and brightness to others, but, even to the most fortunate, the most beloved of the gods, not wholly untarnished by cares

and regrets. What a happy world this might be if——if there were no ifs!

The curtain is raised for the last act, and discovers a scene of great animation and gaiety. It is a ball-room in a fine London house; roses hang in festoons, spring from the cold white marble of the chimney-pieces, frame the windows, garland the staircase. The crystal chandeliers sparkle with the reflected light of a thousand wax candles. Liddell's band wafts you to Paradise on its strains, pretty women in lovely toilettes abound; *ingénues* in tulle and pearls wear an air of resigned melancholy as befits those robbed of their rights, and yet not without hope of better days in store, when they too shall possess 'the charm of married brows.' A charmingly pretty woman, who looks, as

the Americans say, as though she had been poured into her lovely gown, is exchanging greetings with a fine, good-looking man in a doorway. We have seen them both before under different circumstances—the woman is Mrs. Tower, the man Captain Clarendon.

‘This,’ said Nelly, giving him her hand with *empressement*, and showing her pearly teeth in a sweet smile, ‘this is indeed an agreeable surprise! We will go into the conservatory and have a nice long talk. I am engaged for the next dance, but we will hide away from my partner.’

Then she whispers an aside to the good-looking young fellow on whose arm she leans.

‘Algy, dear boy, don’t look so cross—I am not going to flirt with Captain Claren-

don. He is the property of my bosom friend.'

'Ah,' returns Algy, sullenly, 'I don't suppose that would make much difference to you.'

'You are a rude, disagreeable boy,' she returns, in the same low key, 'and, if you make yourself unpleasant, you shall not take me in to supper.'

Algy tries unsuccessfully to look as if he did not care.

'Go away now, dear boy,' she pursues, patronisingly, 'and, if you have recovered your temper in half-an-hour's time, you may come and look for me in the conservatory. Not unless.'

And with that she transfers her hand from his arm to Clarendon's, and trips heartlessly away, leaving her victim with thoughts of battle, murder and sudden death in his heart.

Captain Clarendon looks so radiantly pleased that anyone might be excused for believing that his joy at seeing Mrs. Tower was on her own account ; but she, however, knew better.

‘ And when did you return ? ’ she asked, when they had secreted themselves behind a group of palms, safe from intrusive eyes and ears.

‘ Two days ago, ’ he replied. ‘ But tell me, I am so tired of waiting, is the time not ripe yet ? ’

‘ Well, ’ said Nelly, ‘ I believe we are really coming within measurable distance of it. She has left off crape, and she has not mentioned his name for a whole month. ’

‘ Ah ! ’ and Clarendon gave a long sigh of satisfaction.

‘It is a great misfortune,’ pursued Mrs. Tower, ‘for a woman to have a strong organ of idealisation—particularly when she has nothing to do but to think. Here has she been worshipping the memory of this man, who wasn’t a particularly good fellow after all, and planting roses on his grave (figuratively speaking, of course, because the fish ate him up in the Atlantic), and believing that there never was such a hero.’

‘But,’ interrupted Clarendon, ‘that shows the beautiful constancy of her nature.’

‘Ah, no,’ returned Nelly, lightly, ‘it shows perversity and cussedness. Here she has a really nice, good, kind man devoted to her, and she can’t take the goods the gods provide, but must fret after an

illusion—or pretend to, for really, in the bottom of her heart, I believe she is fond of you, only that she is ashamed for anyone to think that she could love again, after all her woe and mourning for the dear departed.'

'Oh,' cried Clarendon, joyfully, though a little shocked at his companion's unfeeling way of putting things, 'do you really think there is any hope for me?'

'Yes,' answered Nelly, 'I really do. And, what is more, I am going to make it the business of my life to bring about the happiness of you both.'

Clarendon took her hand with a gesture that would have goaded Algy to madness had he witnessed it.

'It is ridiculous,' Mrs. Tower continued, 'to suppose that a handsome young woman

like Ethel is to perform moral Suttee over one man, and to lead a barren, loveless life from a purely mistaken and fallacious notion. Here is a nice, kind, good-looking man, as I said, (don't blush! *il n'y a pas de quoi*) dying to love her, and to make her happy, and to endow her with his worldly goods—thank Heaven! you can't be suspected of mercenary motives—and she has not the courage to take him and be thankful! But it will come right—it shall come right, and you will both be happy ever after.'

'If I could make her love me,' said Clarendon, 'I should be the happiest man on earth.'

Nelly bestowed a comical little smile upon him.

'Ah!' she said, 'what delightful crea-

tures you men would be if you remained lovers, and never attained the object of your affections. It is the pursuit that charms and excites you. We poor women think you are always going to be the same, and are horribly disappointed when you become husbands.'

'There is no doubt,' returned Hugo, gallantly, 'that we are none of us good enough for you.'

'I always think,' remarked Mrs. Tower, with apparent irrelevancy, 'that it is mean to see the sweet uses of adversity in the case of our friends, but I do think that poor Ethel's misfortunes have improved her wonderfully. Oh, yes,' laughing, 'I read in your eyes that there could never have been any room for improvement, but there was. She was always

kind and generous, but she was a little bit of an autocrat, and now she is quite gentle and yielding.'

'I never saw her anything else,' said Clarendon, loyally.

'Now you must not,' returned Nelly, 'look as if I had been wishing to disparage her, or I shall not feel so benevolently disposed towards you.'

'Don't say that,' he entreated.

'My idea is this,' she answered, 'Ethel is coming to stay with me as soon as I leave London, which, alas! will be next week. How would you like to come too.'

'Oh!' he cried, joyfully, 'how good you are.'

'Ours is a shockingly dull place,' remarked Nelly, mischievously, 'and there

will be nothing on earth for you to do but to sit about in the garden with Ethel, or stroll in the forest with her, or drive her about in the pony-cart.'

Hugo's eyes glistened.

'And,' she went on, 'there will be nothing for you to kill but time.'

'I suppose,' he said, radiantly, 'that you know you are offering me the greatest happiness that I could possibly have. Somehow I have never been able to get her to myself since those dear days of our voyages together. There has always been a third.'

'I promise you,' she answered, gaily, 'there shall be no third on this occasion, or very seldom. It is the most disagreeable position in the world.'

At this moment Algy came in sight.

‘I object to it quite as much,’ said Clarendon, rising with a smile, ‘so now I shall leave you with your victim, who looks as if he would like to shoot me. Do not break his heart.’

‘I am only toughening it,’ she laughed, ‘young hearts want that.’

He took leave of her, and walked straight out of the house and back to his rooms. He wanted to think over the heavenly prospect that this good fairy had just unfolded to him. To sit about in a garden with his beloved, to stroll in a forest with her, to be driven by her in a pony-cart, what rapture! Was she really beginning to think less of the dead man who had been so potent a rival—would she ever give to him a tithe of the love she had lavished on the other? She

had crept into his heart during those days at sea together, and there she had remained, growing ever and ever dearer. From time to time he had seen her; once even he had stayed a whole week at the Manor House, but something had forbidden him to breathe, even to look what he felt for her. The air of gentle melancholy which she invariably wore had been an effectual barrier between them—he had not even dared to utter a hint of his feelings—it would have seemed a sacrilege. At last he had taken Mrs. Tower into his confidence, and she, whilst bidding him hope, had counselled patience, and three months ago, when he had well-nigh fallen into despair, she had advised him to pay a lengthened visit to his sister in America.

‘There is nothing in the world,’ she

said, 'like absence, particularly when a woman is leading a dull life. She will take to thinking of you instead of the other one, and she will discover that living on a memory is not good enough. And you may trust me to put in a word in season when the opportunity offers.'

Hugo thanked her warmly and went off to America, but he left his heart behind him, and the love and the longing he felt for his dear lady took all the zest and sweetness out of life. He did not go about looking wretched and woe-begone, but in his soul he carried that craving which gnaws at the root of contentment and happiness. When we cannot look into the eyes we love nor touch the hand that thrills us as no other has power to do, life is a poor, common-place, prosy

business. Love makes prose into poetry, common-place into originality.

It was the evening of Ethel's arrival at The Beeches, Mrs. Tower's place of residence, and the two ladies were sitting under a big tree in the pretty, old-fashioned garden. Nelly artfully brought up Hugo Clarendon's name.

'I wonder what has become of him?' said Mrs. Delane, looking pensively into the distance. 'What an immense time he has been away! No doubt he has fallen in love with an American, and will be marrying and bringing her home. Most men who go to America do.'

'Oh, my dear,' cried Nelly, with feigned surprise, 'do you mean to say that I did not tell you of my meeting him at the Wolverhamptons' ball?'

‘No,’ returned Ethel, in a somewhat injured tone, ‘you never mentioned his name.’

‘Really,’ exclaimed Mrs. Tower, ‘I think my memory must be going. He was looking so well and so nice, and I asked him to come down here and stay for a few days.’

Nelly stole a glance at her friend, and was delighted to see the vivid blush that mantled in her cheek.

‘He is coming to-morrow, or the next day,’ she proceeded, ‘I am not sure which, and how on earth we shall manage to amuse him I don’t know.’

‘I do not think he wants much amusing,’ returned Ethel. ‘He does not get bored like some men—at least, I never saw him look bored.’

Ethel retired that night with a very agreeable sensation in her heart. She had been horribly afraid that he would succumb to the fascinations of an American, and was heartily thankful to find that he had not done so. She went over in her mind all the episodes of their first voyage across the Atlantic together, and remembered with pleasure all his kind and tender care for her. She did not think it necessary to let her thoughts get as far as her husband's death—she had spent so many months in thinking of and deploring him. She was now in admirable health and looks and fair spirits, and, somehow, the thought of a living man was more agreeable to her than that of a dead one.

Ethel had vastly improved in character

and disposition since we last saw her. She had lost much of the imperiousness and self-will which were her besetting sins, and she had taken immense pains to control her autocratic tendencies. Even her servants who had always liked her were conscious of a great change in her for the better, and were now ready to worship her.

The next day brought Hugo, full of joyful anticipations. He thought she had never looked so lovely and loveable, and, if he had wished to preserve the secret of his admiration for her, his eyes would have betrayed him at once.

Mrs. Tower was the most considerate of friends, if a little neglectful as a hostess, for she was always finding a hundred things to do which took her away from

her guests. They, however, were extremely considerate and unexacting, and did not appear in any way hurt or offended at being left so much to their own devices. On the third night after Hugo's arrival, Nelly paid him a visit in the smoking-room, after seeing Mrs. Delane to her apartment.

'I am afraid,' she said, with a twinkle in her eye, 'that you will think me a very rude woman, but I am obliged to go to London to-morrow for the whole day. I have to interview a cook, and to do various other disagreeable things. I hope that you will be amusing yourself better here.'

'Oh!' he cried, eagerly, 'do you think I might speak?'

'Yes,' she answered, smiling, 'I do. But you must be diplomatic and rather determined.'

He looked inquiringly at her.

‘Well,’ she said, interpreting his glance, ‘I can imagine it possible that she will begin by saying her love is buried in the grave, and that she could never think of loving again. If she does, you must be firm. You must say that you cannot go on any longer in a state of uncertainty, that it is undermining your health (though,’ laughing, ‘I fear your looks belie that), and that, if she will not marry you, you will start off on a tour round the world next week. Do you promise me to say that?’

He promised, and she left him in a very happy and hopeful frame of mind. The next day Hugo was as nervous as a school-girl—he was so fearful of putting his fate to the touch. He had not made his declaration by luncheon, and he felt

that the matter must positively be settled one way or another before Mrs. Tower returned, or she would think him a fool.

In the afternoon he took Mrs. Delane for a walk in a retired part of the Forest, and here they presently came upon a felled tree, which seemed to offer a suitable and appropriate resting-place. Ethel sat down upon it as he suggested, and looked a little embarrassed.

This fine, big young man, who had never hitherto been deficient in nerve, felt quite shy and out of countenance, but he made a mighty effort and took his courage in both hands.

‘I wonder,’ he said, ‘if you know what I have brought you here to say?’

Mrs. Delane averted her eyes, and

seemed deeply interested in some object at the end of the distant glade.

‘ Oh,’ he uttered, humbly, but with great earnestness, ‘ do let me hope if you can. I have loved you so long and so faithfully, but I have been silent all this time because——’

He did not give his reason, as he did not quite know how to put it into words.

Ethel was silent. That at least was not inauspicious. A woman always checks a man at once when she intends to refuse his suit.

He held his breath; she was speaking in a low voice.

‘ How can I love,’ she asked, gently, ‘ when my heart is buried in the grave?’

‘ Why should it be?’ he said, taking her hand and speaking with deep emotion.

‘You are so lovely and loveable—you were created to make a man’s happiness, and why should you starve your heart and his?’

‘But,’ she objected, ‘I have no right to give silver in exchange for your gold. I could make you but such a poor return.’

He stole nearer to her, and clasped her hand more firmly.

‘I will turn your silver into gold,’ he uttered, passionately, ‘or, if not, I will be content to let it remain silver. A man who is threatened with bankruptcy does not quarrel with the coin that is to save him.’

‘And,’ said Ethel, ‘I must say something else to you. You think too well of me—indeed, I am not what you believe me to be, but a tiresome, tyrannical, ex-

acting woman. If I had not been, he,' with a little sob, 'would have been alive now.'

'I think I know you better than you know yourself,' answered Hugo, tenderly. 'Why, was I not with you for three weeks under the most trying circumstances that could have befallen any woman, and you behaved like an angel all through!'

Ethel smiled faintly.

'Surely,' she said, 'if I had been the most odious woman on earth, I could not have made myself disagreeable to a man who treated me with such wonderful goodness.'

'There was no goodness about it,' returned Hugo, stoutly—'it was my greatest happiness to serve you.'

'But,' she still objected, 'if you found

me cross and perverse, your love would go.'

By this time Hugo's arm had, not without some fear of a rebuff, clasped her slender waist.

'If,' he whispered, 'you say you could not be unkind to one who was good to you, what have I to fear? I will devote my whole life to making you happy.'

'I wonder,' she said, with a melancholy little smile turning to look at him, 'why you should love me?'

'Am I the only person who loves you?' he asked, fondly. 'And what does your looking-glass say? But what does it matter why I love you, since the fact remains? As Adelaide Proctor says,

"I take you as a gift that God has given me,
And I love you."

Her head was on his breast now ; his fond lips pressed to hers, and she knew part in wonder, part in joy, part in shame, that, however much of her heart was buried, there was enough left for her own happiness and for the happiness of the man who loved her.

THE END.

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